

The End and the Beginning

**The Revolutions of 1989 and
the Resurgence of History**

Edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob

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*The Revolutions of 1989 and the
Resurgence of History*

Edited by

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

with

BOGDAN C. IACOB



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INTRODUCTION

Preliminaries

The present volume is an attempt to provide a fresh interpretation of the contexts, meanings, and consequences of the revolutions of 1989. It does not aim to search for ‘new truths’ or novel explanations for the fall of Communism and for the peaceful and sudden upheavals that took place in 1989. It does, however, emphatically argue for re-thinking, re-visiting, and re-assessing the filters and means that scholars use to interpret this watershed moment in our recent history. The editors perceive the present project more as a challenge to existing readings of the complex set of issues and topics presupposed by a re-evaluation of 1989 as a symbol of the change and transition from authoritarianism to democracy. In this context, the volume begins and ends with two essays that both bring together our present understandings on the subject and lay the ground for further realignment of scholarly analysis. Vladimir Tismaneanu’s contribution opening the volume is first of all an overview of the state of the art about the causes, meanings, and consequences of 1989. Secondly, though, the author insists in signaling out the four fundamental directions adopted by the volume’s contributors: (1) the possibilities of situating 1989 in both global and European history with the benefit of the hindsight of more than twenty years since the events happened; (2) the determining elements that brought the world to 1989 with a special focus on the relationship between core and periphery within the Soviet bloc; (3) the plural ways of comprehending the contexts that set up communism’s demise and the upheavals of 1989 in various Eastern European countries; (4) the multifarious nature of the way we can map out and interpret these revolutions and communism’s aftermath (e.g., intellectual and discursive legacies, challenges of

transitional justice, structural backwardness, or emulation for further democratization movements).

The working premise of the volume is formulated by Tismaneanu, who declares that understanding the ramifications of 'the upheaval in the East' helps us grasp the meanings of the ongoing debates about liberalism, socialism, nationalism, civil society, and the very notion of human freedom in the aftermath of a most atrocious century. At the same time, the author argues that, in the two decades that followed 1989, the discomfiture with democratic challenges and the prevailing constitutional pluralist model was not only linked to the transition from Leninism, but to the larger problem of legitimation and the existence of competing visions of common good and rival symbols of collective identity. Nevertheless, as all present contributions emphasize to varying degrees, the most important lesson of 1989 remains that societies can be peacefully transformed by the belief in, and the rehabilitation and affirmation of civility, decency and humanity.

The book has four sections, each comprising approaches along the directions suggested in Vladimir Tismaneanu's opening contribution. The first part deals with the memories and legacies of 1989. It begins with an article by Gale Stokes that discusses the legacies of 1989 from the point of view of the new type of politics brought about by the generalization of the liberal democratic economic and political structures in most of Europe. He argues that such social, political, and economic realignment led to a new and more stable style of large-scale human interaction in which diversity, change, negotiation, compromise, and economic competition replaced warfare as the primary mode of international relations. However, the author insists that a full transition from the pre-1989 establishment is premised upon the overcoming of the self-centered, ethnocratic identitarian narratives that had been formulated during the various authoritarian experiences throughout most of the twentieth century. At the same time, Stokes cautions about the new ways of instrumentalizing history, especially by a coarse, unilateral anticommunism that rather functions as legitimator for various political actors rather than as a means through which to come to terms with the past. Stokes prefers to situate the events of 1989 within the larger framework of the developing political, supragovernmental structures of the recent decades founded upon

principles such as pluralism, tolerance, and open instead of closed perceptions of national identity. Agnes Heller's is a rather more personal account that counterpoises the expectations raised by 1989 and the realities of its aftermath. She first provides a brief theoretical overview of the nature of the communist regimes, trying to point to the blueprint common to all communisms. Moreover, rather than advancing a determinist, teleological explanation of 1989, Heller prefers to stress the fortuity of the developments that prepared for communism's demise. She also analyzes the profile of the past two decades from the point of view of an inescapable incompleteness in democratic construction in Eastern Europe, based upon the difficulty to create institutions, the constitution of liberties, and the liberal spirit necessary for the consolidation of democracy. She underlines the present danger of the proven inability of the youth's socialization with and integration into the institutions and values that lay at the foundation of the European, post-totalitarian project.

Karol Soltan's contribution shifts the focus to the grander narratives consolidated following the watershed of 1989. He extensively discusses the shifting meanings of citizenship in the postcommunist and post-9/11 period based on the existing perceptions of civil ideals in the post-totalitarian world. His article first inquires into what could be considered the spirit of 1989; that is, the potential of improvement incumbent in the new situation brought forth by such a turning point. He prefers to move away from 1989 as a year and advocates for understanding it within a global framework that includes transformations in places such as Latin America, South Africa, or even the Philippines. Soltan states that the spirit of 1989 brought forth the overarching overlying project of *moderate* modernity: a project that no longer validates a radical, revolutionary transformation of human society. In contrast, such an alternative vision of modernity, is founded upon the validation and vindication of a continuity of the politics of democratization. Such emphasis on moderation allows the author to propose a middle-of-the-road type of explanation for communism's demise: it was result of the meeting of revolution from below with that from above. Overall, the resulting civil project at the heart of the spirit of 1989 is perceived as the last stage of a redeeming narrative defining the second half of the "age of extremes." For Soltan, it is the opposite side of the coin, i.e. an alternative project to the dark side of

totalitarianism's project of illiberal modernity. In his contribution, Konrad Jarausch takes on established understandings of 1989 in order to search for the possibility of an alternative reading of the events. His 'revisionism' constitutes an attempt to overcome the explanatory paradox of the seeming permanence of the Communist system and its subsequent rapid overthrow. In this context, the author develops a new interpretative model that stems from the idea of "people power" substantiating the innovations of 1989: the peaceful path towards regime change against all odds. According to Jarausch, 1989 created a new model of negotiated transition, which not only replaced a government, but also overturned an entire political and social system without violence.

Following a different path than the previous contributions, Cornel Ban's paper focuses upon one of the possible legacies of the events of 1989. He analyzes whether the crumbling of communism's social utopia had an impact on the outlook of social democracy. He dismisses from the beginning the inference that the future of social democracy would be affected because of its affinity with the compromised project of really existing socialism. He argues instead that 1989 came after Western social democracy had abandoned the revisionist terms of postwar welfare Keynesianism and forged the terms of a "Third Way" compromise between neoclassical economics and a "social-liberal" reading of the welfare state. In explaining the current crisis of social democracy, Ban emphasizes the importance of economic ideas rather than political party ideology or specific, local material circumstances. The author concludes that the rightward shift of social democracy since the seventies was due to debates that were endogenous to West European politics and economics rather than to what was happening across the Iron Curtain.

These rather broad surveys of the effects of 1989 as a turning point give way to another set of articles that look into some of the underlining factors that influenced the course of events at the time. The second section of the volume dwells on the ways in which the gradual departure from the world of the Cold War allowed for the reinvention of politics in Eastern Europe. In a comprehensive contribution, Mark Kramer debunks narratives that depict the sudden downfall of the Communist regimes in 1989 and the opening of the Berlin Wall as the inevitable result of a lengthy process of systemic

decay. He alternatively states that the largely peaceful collapse of East European Communism in 1989 resulted in part from sweeping changes in Soviet policy adopted under Mikhail Gorbachev, in part from the courageous actions of individuals and groups in Eastern Europe, and in part from the loss of will among hard-line East European Communist leaders as they realized, to their horror, that the Soviet Union would no longer come to their aid with military force. The rapidly improving state of East-West relations was an important backdrop for this process, giving Soviet leaders greater confidence that Western governments would not seek to foment anti-Soviet uprisings or exploit changes in Eastern Europe against the USSR. In addition, an element of chance and contingency contributed to the auspicious outcome in the fall of 1989, especially to the opening of the Berlin Wall, which occurred as much thorough inadvertence as through design. Such converging trends — from above, from below, and from outside — produced an outcome in Eastern Europe that Gorbachev had neither desired nor anticipated. Echoing Kramer's interpretation, Vladislav Zubok's contribution emphasizes a crucial linkage between perestroika politics and the developments in Eastern Europe. According to Zubok, the Soviet Union's role in 1989 has to be analyzed by focusing on several complementary process: a) the de-legitimization by Gorbachev and his reform-minded of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm that for decades called for Soviet domination of Eastern Europe; b) the rather improvised and reactive (instead of preventive or preemptive) nature of Gorbachev's positions toward domestic situations in the various Eastern European countries; c) the 'new thinking' interaction with the foreign policy agenda of the West; d) the deepening systemic internal crisis of the Soviet Union that more often than not distracted the Moscow center from what was happening in its satellites. The author concludes by re-affirming the importance of the Soviet leader's influence on the 1989 events, but he also stresses the necessity of healthy revisionism in situating such a phenomenon within the larger context of communism's demise.

Rather than analyzing a multiplicity of processes or the role of various political actors, Jeffrey Herf underscores the vital impact of one of the main Cold War crises – the battle of the Euromissiles of 1983. He considers this to have been a starting point for the unreeling thread of events that ultimately resulted in the end of bipo-

larism itself. In a re-evaluation of his theses put forth in the volume *War by Other Means*,¹ Herf shows how despite massive demonstrations in Western Europe and West Germany, these countries' governments made a shambles of the Kremlin's strategy to use the fear of nuclear war to weaken American influence in Europe and perhaps even destroy the Western Alliance. This victory was also a decisive defeat for the Soviet hard line, thus paving the way to the changes in Soviet foreign policy supported by Gorbachev. Furthermore, the author advocates a re-interpretation of the role of the key battles of what was called the Cold War in preparing the ground and conditions for the revolutions of 1989 and the collapse of communism in 1991 in the Soviet Union. The section's last contribution also focuses on the role of another key actor in Cold War politics: the activity of Radio Free Europe during the events of 1989. Ross Johnson argues that as dissident and opposition groupings and movements developed in Eastern Europe and the USSR, RFE's national sections demonstrated their full value as amplifiers of dissent from as well as providers of outside information to the region. They became megaphones conveying censored voices from Eastern Europe and the USSR back to those countries. Moreover, as local circumstances evolved in the countries of the Soviet Bloc, by 1989, RFE also began to provide independent on-the-spot reporting. Before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Johnson shows how RFE provided its listeners with comprehensive information about the changes sweeping through Eastern Europe and, in doing so, showed them the new horizons that were opening up and demonstrated the scope of the support for change in the region. Johnson concludes that RFE's contribution and merit was that it understood the significance of broadcasting relevant information and perspectives that sustained the possibility for a peaceful self-liberation of Eastern Europe.

The third section furthers these arguments in the sense that its contributions discuss the deeper trends in the development of some Eastern European communist regimes; trends that, on the one hand, set up for the upheavals of 1989, and, on the other hand, had lasting

¹ Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

consequences for these countries' postcommunist developments. Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob propose a re-evaluation of the nature of the communist regime during Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule. At the same time, they re-assess the profile of the immediate postcommunist aftermath in the light of the resulting physiognomy of the pre-1989 regime. They emphasize a national Stalinist synthesis that was defined by a hybridization of the system's radical transformist ethos with a neo-traditional re-conceptualization of the Nation as *the* Messianic agent in history. According to the authors, National Stalinism was a complex set of policies, ideological tenets, and social contexts reflecting the party's commitment to building socialism in a country defined as "a nationalizing nation-state."² Tismaneanu and Iacob argue that, by the end of the seventies, the result of this mixture of Byzantine political rites, Stalinist polity construction, and revolutionary para-modern resentful fantasies was Ceaușescu's dynastic socialism. The authors conclude by identifying three central legacies of national Stalinism in post-1989 Romania: a patrimonialism exacerbated by the legacy of dynastic socialism; a collective imaginarium imprinted by the Romanian Communist Party's nationalization of the masses or the re-imagination of the national community; and, a persistent social utopia of the civilizational project incumbent in communism's illiberal modernity.

On a similar path of discussing the interplay between communism and nationalism, Nick Miller's article analyzes the *differentia specifica* in the development of Serbian intellectuals in the last decade of the Yugoslav regime. He stresses the fact that despite Serbian intellectuals' self-perception as part of a broader movement for human rights exemplified by groups like KOR and Charter '77, they failed to embrace the universal, humane, and tolerant qualities that are usually attributed to the revolutions and intellectuals of Europe's 1989. Through an analysis of the relationship and wrangling between the members of the Praxis group and the Dobrica Ćosić and his followers, Miller's explanation for this paradox is that by the end of the eighties the nationalist opposition almost completely swamped the Marxist

² Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63.

one. The ascendance of nationalism among Serbia's intellectuals and their gradual departure from a discourse of human rights and liberties was rooted in the domestic context of the Yugoslav federation in the seventies and eighties. The author contends that the Serbian intellectual community did seek for truth, authenticity, and civic dignity but all within an ethnic context. Under the circumstances, Miller argues that, by the end of the eighties, the stories that Serbian intellectuals fell back on were belligerent tales of national destiny, struggle, and conflict.

Catalin Avramescu's contribution signals a shift of focus within this section of the volume, for he moves toward evaluating the impact of the Romanian communist regime's failure to sustain one of its main civilizational pretenses: bringing light to the people as social utopia became reality. He first provides a brief overview of the relationship between the symbolism of light and the transformist aims of the Bolshevik revolution. According to the author, electricity for Lenin encapsulated a principle of order and it simultaneously expressed the imaginary of a promised "radiant future." The author then moves to discuss the case of Romania, where he shows a similar officialization of the rhetoric of light took place. Electricity and light were part and parcel of the theater of everyday life, as they were integrated into what was a liturgy of social control. In this context, Avramescu points to the dramatic effect that the phenomenon of widespread blackouts had on the legitimacy of the Communist regime during the last decade of its existence. Moreover, he argues that by shying away from the use of neon lights and consumerism, the Romanian Communist Party was also acting on the priority of upholding, in times of crisis, an austere Marxist-Leninist ideology of accumulation, egalitarianism, and control. Bradley Abrams' contribution also dwells on the problem of the (de-)legitimization of the communist regime during its last two decades by means of consumption and consumerism. After the military intervention in 1968 in Czechoslovakia, as the last hope of ideological rebirth of state socialism was shattered, Eastern European regimes relied on a primarily economic mode of legitimization, couched in what has been called by many observers a *tacit social contract*. They focused on offering a reasonable and steadily-rising standard of living and a social safety net in return for political quiescence. Throughout the Soviet

bloc, however, this strategy came to pieces in the late 1970s, when waste, corruption and the diversion of fiscal resources to consumption all contributed to its demise. Using the case of Czechoslovakia, Abrams shows how by 1989, public opinion under communism had turned sharply pessimistic and critical, pointing out shortcomings in several aspects of life that directly affected people's standards of living and their quality of life. Abrams concludes by declaring that the failure of anticipating the demise of state socialism can also be explained by the analysts' inability to properly understand the nature and importance of the relationship between identity and consumption within the various societies of the Soviet bloc. Moreover, he considers that this failure led observers on both the political left and the political right to misjudge East-Central Europeans' considerable, although unwitting, preparation for the changes that occurred in 1989.

The final contribution in this section makes the transition to the last part of the volume, analyzing as it does a pre-1989 context, while also evaluating its legacies during the postcommunist aftermath. Ioan and David Morar's paper is more of an insider's account about the evolution of Romanian mass media from the times of communist dominance and control to the fluidity and murky ground of post-communist politics and debates. The authors underline the regime's control over the media both by means of institutional and ideological coercion and by way of encouraging self-censorship and duplicity. The practices of cowing journalists imposed a pattern of behavior that, after 1989, translated itself into a mass media that was far from fulfilling its role as an agent of democratization. Furthermore, they argue that the economic politics of Romanian post-1989 journalism accentuated the patrimonialist and partisanship of domestic mass media. Both the state and the private sector adopted policies that only strengthened the bond between local interest groups and the media. After more than twenty years since the fall of communism, corrupt economic, political, and media elites brought the mass media into a Purgatorium-like stage: it does bear resemblance to modern, inquisitive, dynamic, plural media conducive to liberal democracy, but in reality it represents the voice of oligarchs with hardly any interest in the common good.

As anticipated by Morars' contribution, the fourth part of the volume deals mainly with the various ways of understanding and

revisiting the aftermaths of the communist experience in the various countries of the former Soviet Bloc. Noemi Marin's article examines, by means of a close analysis of the leader's public speeches, Nicolae Ceaușescu's isolationist perspective as a disjunction of political, historical, and rhetorical realities. Her findings highlight dimensions pertinent to the totalitarian rhetoric of Romanian communism. The overview of the political discourse developed in the last years of the regime allows the author to point to some discursive and cultural implications for the post-1989 public sphere in Romania. Marin states that what characterized Ceaușescu's political discourse in 1989 as totalitarian was his relentless and unchanging rhetoric of communist promises and praise, devoid of any acknowledgment of realities surrounding his words, leaving them emptied of meaning. However, by 1989 and in the aftermath of the Romanian Revolution, behind the vehement, self-insulating discourse of communist power lay and developed a tumult of political narratives; public and/or historical arguments that continue to form, re-form, and/or unsettle the new future, a yet-to-settle time for yet-to-settle citizens of post-communist Romania. Similarly searching for some of the intellectual consequences of communist times, Marci Shore discusses the legacy of Central European dissidence and its role in contemporary politics about the past in the region. She takes several high-profile cases of critical intellectuals, such as Milan Kundera or Bronisław Wildstein, in order to show how lustration and the access to the files of the secret police in Poland and the Czech Republic re-construct and re-sort the memory of the communist experience. Shore demonstrates how the battle over the past in Central Europe is both an operation of making sense of recent history and a set of strategic actions meant to legitimize various political actors. The author also analyzes the manner in which questions of guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust play into the general public debate about dealing with the communist past (she uses the example of Jan Gross' volume *Fear* and the reactions of the leadership of the Polish Institute for National Memory to this publication). After surveying various 'battles' over the memory of the totalitarian experience, Shore argues that the legacy of dissidence is turning into a nostalgia for moral purity: the moral purity of speaking truth against power—and of suffering for it. She remarks that the new generation of young intellectuals shares this intellectual tradition of

treating political questions as philosophical ones. However, Shore underlines that, in contrast to the principle of anti-politics, this new cohort of intellectuals perceives the return to political engagement as a moral imperative.

Taking on the cue of the challenges of dealing with the past from the previous paper, Lavinia Stan's contribution tries to explain the role of 1989's remarkable events, the nature of the communist regime, and the first stages of democratization in the post-communist pursuit of backward-looking transitional justice. Stan identifies three main clusters of post-communist transitional justice experiences, ranging from radical, moderate, and very mild. She then goes on to survey the scholarship that tied progress in the democratization process to the impact of transitional justice. She concludes by advocating for further study of the impact of important factors such as political leadership, international pressure, and cross-country emulation upon the different routes post-communist countries have pursued in order to redress their recent pasts. James McAdams' article also dwells on the impact of the pursuit or the claims for justice upon postcommunist political environments. His paper is a re-evaluation of the connection between the expectations of learned observers in the early 1990s about the future, the incurring controversies during the first decade of postcommunism, and scholars' ability to draw general observations, from the cases of the former Soviet bloc countries, about the relevance of transitional justice for the politics of democratic regimes. Mainly using examples from Germany's experience of dealing with the communist past, McAdams concludes that there is a noticeable tendency toward the politicization of transitional justice in Eastern Europe, which makes it more difficult for politicians to engage in reasoned dialogue about complex and contentious issues. In this context, the author argues that the act of overcoming the past can fulfill its role in the process of democratization only if approached with the care and authenticity it deserves.

Tom Gallagher provides a big-picture type of analysis of Romania's structural problems brought about by more than twenty years of postcommunist politics. He looks into the process by which Romanian political elites drained the process of Europeanisation of nearly all progressive content, while simultaneously creating for themselves, in the context of EU accession, unparalleled opportunities to

acquire fresh legitimacy, new sources of material wealth, and perhaps even geopolitical leverage. Gallagher remarks that Romania's various elites have been single-minded in adapting change to suit their private political and economic interests. Subsequently, the author considers that the main political cleavage in Romania is between those determined to shape the country around rules and values which benefit a restricted set of players, and those still committed to the arduous task of building institutions and establishing norms which make the state legitimate in the eyes of the vast majority of its citizens.

The last contribution of this section is an attempt to connect the democratizing wave of 1989 with similar European movements during the mid-2000s. Peter Voitsekhovsky's article re-assesses the "Orange Revolution" in the Ukraine by surveying the characteristics of this "colored revolution" in comparison with the upheavals of 1989. He argues that there are remarkable parallels between the two phenomena in terms of their motives, the features of respective *ancien régimes*, and the spontaneity of mass mobilization. Drawing on the work of Padraic Kenney, Voitsekhovsky does point to a significant contrast between the two phenomena—the differing role of their carnival components. He argues that the carnival of the Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" was peaceful, non-violent, and very optimistic, but it did not result in any significant institutional changes for the country, unlike the cases of Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary. More than five years later, Ukrainians are confronted with the same old faces within the political leadership. One explanation for this situation is, according to the author, the absence of the actors that were vital to the outlook and evolution of the revolutions of 1989: critical intellectuals.

The concluding paper of the volume, by Jeffrey Isaac, is a fresh overview of the most important challenges brought forth by the interpretations of the significance and meaning of the revolutions of 1989. More than twenty years after, Isaac advocates the necessity for constant re-readings of the legacy of such watershed events. He emphasizes an interpretation focused on the fundamental plural heritage and impact of 1989 on both Eastern Europe and the rest of the world. The undeniable success of the transition from authoritarianism to liberalism brought forth the departure from what Isaac calls "the colorations of utopia." But he also underlines that the "we" who celebrate

the “velvet revolutions” of 1989 ought to do so with circumspection and with a sense of self-limitation because of the complexities behind the ‘normality’ of postcommunist societies. He takes his point further in declaring that 1989 means different things to different individuals and constituencies, and, therefore, is the source of ongoing and *legitimate* debate, as all debate must be legitimate in a liberal democracy. Additionally, evaluations of 1989 cannot leave aside a discussion of the *costs* of postcommunist transformation. Isaac also provides a brief list of a number of different and yet complimentary strategies whereby intellectuals and scholars have sought to keep alive the complex legacies of 1989. In a conclusion that draws upon some of the most important ideas advanced by several contributions in this volume, Jeffrey Isaac defines the shades of Adam Michnik’s beautiful gray as expressions of liberal democracy’s diversity and pluralism. Ultimately, the ups and downs, the hopes and disillusion, the progress and setbacks of more than twenty years of political, cultural, social, and economic transformations since 1989 are only manifestations and facets of this extraordinary form of ordinary politics.

A few acknowledgements need to be made. The present volume includes the proceedings of the conference “The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History” (November 9–10, 2009). It was part of a multi-year project (started in 2007) coordinated by the Center for the Study of Post-Communist Societies at the University of Maryland (College Park) in collaboration with the Romanian Cultural Institute. The project aims to provide, by means of reflecting on watershed moments of post-1945 history, an overview of the global dynamics characteristic of the twentieth century and its lessons and impact upon the twenty-first. The conveners of the conference were H.R. Patapievici, president of the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI), Vladimir Tismaneanu, professor of politics at University of Maryland, and Christian Ostermann, director of the Cold War International History Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The editors would like to express their gratitude to H.R. Patapievici and Mircea Mihăieș, the RCI’s Vice-President, who enthusiastically embraced the idea of a series of conferences on seminal political-intellectual issues, in Washington, D.C. with the purpose of strengthening and developing the already existent connections between the Romanian

scholarly community and American academia. We are also grateful to Iulia Motoc, Tom Blanton, and Emil Hurezeanu, whose contributions greatly enriched the discussions and debates during the conference proceedings. The editors would also like to honor the memory of the late Victor Zaslavsky who presented at the conference a memorable paper on “The Long Death of the Italian Communist Party.” Charles Gati, Mills Kelly, Charles King, and Lavinia Stan were superb discussants for the event’s panels.

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

Rethinking 1989

The revolutions of 1989 were, no matter how one judges their nature, a true world-historical event: they established a historical breaking point (only to some extent conventional) between the world before and after '89. During that year, what appeared to be an immutable, ostensibly indestructible system collapsed with breath-taking alacrity. This happened not because of external blows (although external pressure did matter), as in the case of Nazi Germany, but as a consequence of the development of insuperable inner tensions. The Leninist systems were terminally sick, and the disease affected first and foremost their capacity for self-regeneration. After decades of toying with the ideas of intrasystemic reforms ("institutional amphibiousness," as it were, to use X. L. Ding's concept as developed by Archie Brown in his writings on Gorbachev and Gorbachevism), it had become clear that communism did not have the resources for readjustment and that the solution lay not within, but outside, and even against, the existing order.¹

The demise (implosion) of the Soviet Union, consummated before the incredulous eyes of the world in December 1991, was directly and intimately related to the previous dissolution of the East European "outer empire" provoked by the revolutions of 1989. It is

¹ See Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 157–189. In this contribution I elaborate upon and revisit the main ideas as I put them forward in my introduction to Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), as well as in my book *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: Free Press, 1992; revised and expanded paperback, with new afterword, Free Press, 1993).

now obvious that the historical cycle inaugurated by World War I, the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in October 1917, and the long European ideological warfare (or rather a global civil war) that followed had come to an end.² The importance of these revolutions cannot therefore be overestimated: they represent the triumph of civic dignity and political morality over ideological monism, bureaucratic cynicism and police dictatorship.³ Rooted in an individualistic concept of freedom, programmatically skeptical of all ideological blueprints for social engineering, these revolutions were, at least in their initial stage, liberal and non-utopian.⁴ Unlike traditional revolutions they did not originate in a millennialist vision of the perfect society and rejected the role of any self-appointed vanguard in directing the activities of the masses. No political party headed their spontaneous momentum, and in their early stage they even insisted on the need to create new political forms, different from ideologically defined, traditional party differentiations. The fact that the aftermath of these revolutions has been plagued by ethnic rivalries, unsavory political bickering, rampant political and economic corruption, and the rise of illiberal parties and movements, including strong authoritarian, collectivistic trends, does not diminish their generous message and colossal impact. And, it should be noted, it was precisely in the countries where the revolutions did not occur (Yugoslavia) or were derailed (Romania) that the exit from state socialism was particularly convoluted, tottering and in the long run problematic.

² See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–91* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 461–99; see also George Lichtheim on “The European Civil War,” in his book *The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1967), 225–37; Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism and Civilization: A History of Europe in Our Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 666–704.

³ See Václav Havel’s reflections on post-1989 politics in his *Summer Meditations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) and *To the Castle and Back* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

⁴ For the exhaustion of ideological-style secular religions, see Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1991) and S. N. Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Revolutions of 1989*, 89–107

The revolutions of 1989 created a fundamentally new and potentially dangerous situation in which the absence of norms and predictable rational behavior on the part of the involved actors could result in global chaos. This is not to deplore the end of the pre-1989 Cold War arrangements, but simply to point to the need to recognize that these revolutions and the end of Leninism placed all of us in a radically novel situation. As Jeffrey Isaac argued, the revolutions of 1989 not only had more than one cause; they also had more than one meaning and proposed a challenging agenda not only for post-communist societies, but for Western democracies as well.⁵

The upheaval in Eastern Europe represented a series of political revolutions that led to the decisive and irreversible transformation of the existing order. Instead of autocratic, one-party systems, the revolutions created emerging pluralist polities. They allowed the citizens of the former ideologically driven despotisms (closed societies) to recover their main human and civic rights and to engage in the building of open societies.⁶ Instead of centrally planned command economies, all these societies have embarked on creating market economies. In their efforts to meet the triple challenge (creating political pluralism, market economy, and a public sphere, i.e. a civil society) some succeeded better and faster than others.⁷ While it is true that we still do not know whether all these societies have become well-functioning liberal democracies, it is nevertheless important to emphasize that in all of them the Leninist systems based on ideological uniformity, political coercion, dictatorship over human needs and suppression of civic rights have been dismantled.⁸

⁵ See Jeffrey Isaac, *Democracy in Dark Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). For a particularly insightful analysis of the revolutionary upheavals of 1989 and their effects, with special focus on Poland, see Bronisław Geremek, *La rupture: La Pologne du communisme à la démocratie* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

⁶ See Ivo Banac, ed. *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1992.)

⁷ See Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transition: The East European and East German Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), especially 29–105.

⁸ See Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, Gyorgy Markus, *Dictatorship Over Needs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

After 1989, Eastern Europe had to make the transition from Leninist pseudo-modernization to genuine modernity. The countries in the region had to overcome both the fragility (or in some cases the absence) of democratic traditions and their traumatic memory of the twentieth century (most of them having experienced both forms of totalitarianism—fascism and communism). At the beginning of the 1990s, I argued that the most important cause of the “Leninist extinction” (Kenneth Jowitt) was the resurrection and the development of civil society. Without this achievement, the tumult of 1989 would have been replaced by a so-called enlightened despotism. Upon the collapse of state socialism, the crucial regenerative task was the reforging of social glue under circumstances of endemic corruption and moral disarray plaguing these societies. At the root of most post-communist problems lies the fact that Leninism in itself was a form of *misdevelopment*.⁹

The collapse of the communist regimes was inextricably conditioned by the dynamics and specificities of the dialectics of de-Stalinization in the various countries of the region. The trajectory of de-radicalization of these Marxist-Leninist regimes prepared their demise. Under the circumstances, any analysis of the year 1989 should be framed by two crucial theoretical presuppositions. The first is that by the 1980s, the political elites of the communist party-states were in disarray, experiencing loss of self-confidence and ideological decay. Eastern Europe was ruled by *uncivil societies*¹⁰ beset with insecurity, anxiety, despondency, and demoralization. Secondly, Communism in the region experienced the exhaustion of the utopian impulse. Or, to use Ken Jowitt’s coinage, the charismatic impersonalism of communist parties fell into disrepute. State socialism failed to re-invent the heroic mission of its central agent of progress in History: the Communist Party. Stephen Kotkin judiciously stressed that “the

⁹ Tony Judt excellently summarized this situation: “Seventy years of energetic claims to the contrary notwithstanding—there was indeed no Communist society as such: only a wilting state and its anxious citizens.” In Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 658.

¹⁰ Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: The Modern Library, 2009).

collapse of communism was a collapse of establishments.”¹¹ However, by ‘establishments’ one should *also* understand the essential myth of a charismatic Party mobilizing a revolutionary movement toward radically transforming society for the achievement of socialism. By 1989, across former communist Europe one could observe a complex picture of waning faith in Utopia (e.g. by no means everywhere, as Nicolae Ceaușescu died while singing the International) combined with routinization engineered by pragmatic elites.¹²

All of the above considered, it is beyond doubt that by 1989 communist regimes were mired in a deep crisis of legitimacy. These “tyrannies of certitude” (Daniel Chirot) lost their Messianic ardor, which subsequently accelerated the process of their inner disintegration. By 1989, three central myths of Leninism had collapsed: its infallibility, its invincibility, and its irreversibility. The upheaval in Eastern Europe was the ironical vindication of Lenin’s famous definition of a revolutionary situation: those at the top cannot continue to rule in their old ways, and those at the bottom do no longer want to accept these ways. It is here that the salience of *civil society* came into play. It was less relevant how large and/or numerous a dissident group or movement was. What mattered were the perceptions of the dissidents’ role among the elites (i.e. the so-called *intelligentsia*) and within sectors of the population, in the grey area (i.e. bystanders). It was no coincidence that as soon as the Ceaușescu regime fell apart in Romania, the new ruling group, the leaders of the National Salvation

¹¹ Kotkin, *Uncivil Society*, 143.

¹² For an excellent account of the origins of the revolutions of 1989 by way of the successive crises of world Communism augmented by the struggle for power in the Kremlin and the Red Army’s humiliating defeat in Afghanistan see Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989. The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009). Sebestyen also provides a vivid portrait of the Stalinist leaders and their endless cynicism: the frantic womanizing of the apparently Spartan Erich Honecker; the murderousness of Erich Mielke, the Stasi chief who cut his teeth assassinating Trotskyists and anarchists during the Spanish Civil War; the pathological vanity of Nicolae Ceaușescu; and the narrow-minded slyness of the Soviet lackey Todor Zhivkov who, when asked whether he had remained a committed Marxist-Leninist until the end of his thirty-five-year rule of Bulgaria, replied: “Do you take me for an idiot?” Unimaginative and arrogant, these leaders had lost all trace of the egalitarian creed of their youth.

Front, made sure to convey the message to the population that its ruling council had incorporated the few dissident intellectuals in the country known to the people via the Radio Free Europe broadcasts. Dissidents could legitimize post-1989 rule; their presence and ideas provided the very significance of the events. It was meaningful not only that communism collapsed or that the elite imploded, but also how the story unfolded and which ideas and principles filled in the void upon its demise.

I believe that Stephen Kotkin's observation, according to which "1989 did not happen *because* of a broad freedom drive or an establishment self-enrichment drive," is a crucial corrective of our general understanding of that year's upheavals. Nevertheless, such a remark disregards the debilitating and corrosive effects of the dissidents' arguments for authenticity and a return to normalcy on a system that had lost its ideocratic drive. Simple, but pervasive ideas continuously chipped away at the foundation of the party-state monolith. It might not have been a broad drive for freedom, indeed the triumphal march of civil society that has been presented in earlier literature. But the role of ideas in the demise of communism should not be underestimated.

Civil society was the powerful metaphor of the revolt and the revival of the independent mind that gained preeminence as party-states became increasingly decrepit and their elites disenchanted. Civil society was a symbol for the possibility of an alternative to sick regimes marred in stagnation. Sickness, however, can be an excruciatingly long process, and in the mid-1980s Timothy Garton Ash, an astute interpreter of Central European politics, used the predictive metaphor of Ottomanization. Later, the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski insisted that while everyone (even the leaders) had known that Communist regimes could not last forever, hardly anyone foresaw when the debacle would occur. With no end in sight, what remained was that, by the 1980s, Eastern Europe had forged a political myth that provided both criticism and opposition to Communism, and solutions for the aftermath of the latter's possible collapse. Only if we add such a corrective to Kotkin's interpretation can we understand the passion, idealism, and high expectations of 1989 *together with* the ensuing frustration and disappointment of its aftermath.

Dissidents and critical intellectuals successfully created a horizon of expectation that had not existed in Eastern Europe since the Prague

Spring. It is no coincidence that in this new grammar of opposition to Communism John Paul II played such a crucial role.¹³ Kotkin provides a telling quotation for this state of things: the pope's message was "the inviolable right, in God's and man's order of things, for human beings to live in freedom and dignity."¹⁴ The civil society was the polis of human autonomy that escaped and countered the grasp of communist partocracy. The discourse of truth and rights did indeed have revolutionary power. It struck at the heart of the political system itself, for, as Kołakowski once put it, "the lie is the immortal soul of communism." In challenging it, while simultaneously avoiding conventional ideological polarizations, the citizens of this civil society exploded long-held myths of fatality, futility, impotence, and conformity.

If we were to highlight the crucial legacies of 1989, I would argue that they fall into two categories: those that are related to the rebirth of citizenship (a concept obliterated under both communism and fascism), and those that concern the reaffirmation of the truth (as against the mirage of social Utopia). This is the legacy of the critical intelligentsia in the former Soviet bloc, the counterpart to the Leninist debris that has plagued the region in the past twenty years. The contribution of the critical intelligentsia was the first step taken on the way to a return to Europe. The *Europeanization* of the former

¹³ The anti-Communist commitment of the John Paul II, who had experienced both the Nazi occupation and the Stalinist dictatorship, converged with Ronald Reagan's conviction that the Soviet Union was the embodiment of evil. The Pope's vision found its counterpart in the American President's speech at the Brandenburg Gate in 1987, when Reagan urged Gorbachev to tear down the Wall. At the time, this request sounded utopian. Two years later it became fact. Constantine Pleshakov, a distinguished historian of the Cold War, referred extensively to the diary of the Pope's confessor, Father Stanislaw Dziwisz, who documented John Paul's conviction that there was a connection between the Marian apparition at Fatima in 1917 and the demise of Communism. For the Pope, bringing down Communism was a divine imperative. See Constantine Pleshakov, *There is No Freedom without Bread! 1989 and the Civil War that Brought Down Communism* (New York: Ferrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009). For an extensive analysis of John Paul II's views and of his role in the demise of communist regimes in Eastern Europe see Goerge Wiegel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999).

¹⁴ Kotkin, *Uncivil Society*, 116.

communist countries, without being the illusory end of politics, can be envisioned as the first clear break with the last century's dreadful cycle of ideological phantasms. This process could even lead to what Havel has called 'post-democracy': "nothing more, and nothing other, than a democracy that has once again been given human content."¹⁵ But it would be naïve to paint an all too rosy picture. The ideas of 1989's liberating moment are in power, but not necessarily the people who brought them about. In other words, the normal and deserved sense of fulfillment is accompanied by uneasiness, malaise, and disenchantment with a necessarily imperfect present.

Taken by the exhilarating effects of revolutionary turmoil, most observers preferred to gloss over the heterogeneous nature of the anti-communist movements. In fact, not all those who rejected Leninism did so because they were dreaming of an open society and liberal values. Among the revolutionaries there were also populist fundamentalists, religious zealots, and nostalgics of the pre-communist non-democratic regimes. It was only after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the velvet divorce that led to the breakup of Czechoslovakia (into the Czech Republic and Slovakia) that scholars and policy-makers realized that the liberal promise of these revolutions could not be taken for granted and that the aftermath of communism is not necessarily liberal democracy. In the early 1990s it became increasingly clear that the postcommunist era was fraught with all sorts of threats, including bloody ethnic conflicts, social unrest and an infectious rise of old and new sorts of populisms and tribalisms.¹⁶

In the last twenty years, the paradigmatic "worst case scenario" in Eastern Europe, the *exemplum* of the shattering of all democratic values under ethnocratic pressure, has obviously been Yugoslavia. In the former federation, we witnessed what I called a few years ago the "Belgrade syndrome": a form of populism instrumented through militaristic and expansionist policies and demagogic nationalism. Its purpose was to preserve the political domination of the ex-commu-

¹⁵ Václav Havel, *To the Castle*, 328.

¹⁶ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Nationalism, Democracy, and Myth in Postcommunist Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, paperback 2009). For postcommunist politics, see Padraic Kenney, *The Burdens of Freedom: Eastern Europe since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

nist, radically nationalist elite grouped around Slobodan Milošević. The ruling party, the secret police and the army were the pillars upon which Milošević built his personalist, ethnocentric authoritarianism. The secession wars in Yugoslavia proved that this type of politics was neither left nor right. It functionalized and manipulated political slogans with utter disregard for their long-term consequences. Policies were adopted only in accordance to the whims and needs of the clique in power. In the first ten years of postcommunism, the popularity and manifestation of this genre of ‘government’ (identifiable at the time, to varying degrees, in countries such as Croatia, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia, etc.) partially confirmed the warning formulated by Ralf Dahrendorf immediately after 1989:

The greatest risk is probably of another kind altogether. I hesitate to use the word, but it is hard to banish from one’s thoughts: fascism. By that I mean the combination of a nostalgic ideology of community which draws harsh boundaries between those who belong and those who do not, with a new political monopoly of a man or a ‘movement’ and a strong emphasis on organization and mobilization rather than freedom of choice.

The distinguished political scientist superbly summarized the challenge of ethnocracy in Eastern Europe: “In the end, Arcadia is as great of a threat as Utopia and the planned state.” In 1992, he gloomily announced that “the hour of false gods has arrived and that of their worldly spokesmen, the new dictators, as well.”¹⁷

Around the same time, I emphasized that the most important challenges (and implicitly, threats) for Eastern Europe were the resurgence of nationalism, the immaturity of the political culture of the region’s societies (the pace of the maturation process goes a long way to explaining the uneven development of the various countries in the former Soviet bloc), and the transition from a planned to a market economy (i.e. shock therapy vs. neosocialist paternalism). In those years, my discussion of the nationalist wave was, of course, justified

¹⁷ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (New York: Times Books, 1990), 60–111.

by the impact of the wars in the Western Balkans. I thought, and the “Epilogue” of *Reinventing Politics* stands as proof, that ethnocracy was a clear and present danger for the postcommunist *political*. The pathology of primordialisms has since then been neutralized, being gradually pushed to the fringes of public spaces, belonging seemingly only to the domain of the ridicule in politics.

Any analysis of the postcommunist aftermath in Eastern Europe must also take into account the vital role played in the process of the region’s democratization by the NATO enlargement and the EU accession. What at the beginning of the nineties was a somber and threatening international situation transformed into an extremely favorable one in later years. The supra-governmental institutions had a massive influence over the trajectory of these countries, maybe even greater than that of domestic politics. Ken Jowitt correctly noticed that the integration in the European Union was the best news that these countries had received in the past five hundred years. Very few people (if any) anticipated this phenomenon (at most two or three of these countries, but not ten of them, with others closing in fast, e.g., Croatia). Those who did were almost hoping against hope. Undeniably, such a scenario would have been very difficult to imagine if it had not been for the painful jolt given to EU and NATO decision-makers (and their constituencies) by the anarchy and genocide of former Yugoslavia. The tragic example offered by the nations of this communist federation made clear the perilous fate awaiting most of the old Soviet bloc in case there would be no EU enlargement to the East, no adoption of the more unfortunate sister by its richer sibling.

The difficulty of identifying clear divisions between left and right in postcommunist regimes is linked to the ambiguity and even obsolescence of traditional taxonomies. In our postmodern and post-conventional age, with its universal disenchantments and political disillusionments, master-narratives such as Marxism or Leninism have ceased to be exhilarating ideological projects. Both the left and the right need reinvention. Liberalism, conservatism, and socialism have to adapt to the changing times. In some of the postcommunist countries, we can find fragments of a salvageable past – genuine democratic legacies. These are political constellations and practices that could be a foundation for democratic crystallizations in the present. It is symptomatic that one response

to the exhaustion of 'old' politics was the strange bed fellowship between self-proclaimed socialists, the representatives of radical nationalism, and those nostalgic for bureaucratic collectivism. The two decades that have passed since 1989 have yet to bring about in Eastern Europe the implementation of the European Social Model.¹⁸ What we witnessed instead were rather recurrent relapses into paternalist policies similar to the "nanny state" (P. Reddaway) from communist times.

Another significant factor in the dynamics of the postcommunist years was the perception that the civic-romantic stage of the revolution was now over and that the bureaucracy was intent upon consolidating its privileges. Critical intellectuals seem to have lost much of their moral aura and are often attacked as champions of futility, architects of disaster, and incorrigible daydreamers. Their status is extremely precarious precisely because they symbolize the principle of difference that neo-authoritarian politics tends to suppress. In the context of a widespread disenchantment with political involvement, their moderation remains a crucial factor for social equilibrium. They are among the few that can call upon their fellow citizens to avoid mass hysteria, to recognize the need for constitutional consensus, and to foster a culture of predictable procedures. Again Ralf Dahrendorf poignantly expressed this imperative of intellectual responsibility: "Where intellectuals are silent, societies have no future."¹⁹ In a deeply fragmented social and public environment, and under the constant pressures of globalization, Dahrendorf believed that, despite its diminished appeal, the nexus of ideas and action has in no way lost its revitalizing potential as a force of freedom.

There are two schools of thought as to the evaluation of the intellectuals' weight on their respective societies *in the light* of postcommunist developments. On the one hand, we have Timothy Garton Ash's argument about the revolutions of 1989 as "moral resurrections" that

¹⁸ Defined by Tony Judt as the result of a deliberate decision by Europeans to work less, earn less and live better lives. That is, the promise of "job security, progressive tax rates and large social transfer payments" as an "implicit contract between government and citizens, as well as between one citizen and another." See Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 793.

¹⁹ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections*, 149.

emphasized the crucial status of public intellectuals as paragons of a new political style. In his opinion, the most important idea that they brought forward was the re-assessment of the notion of citizenship. Even if their ideal did not reign supreme, what is important is that most of the debates within the public sphere revolved around the idea of civility, of what defines one's belonging to a society and polity.²⁰ In a sense, one might say that the success of a critical intelligentsia lies in the reality of an active, self-conscious, empowered social body. On the other hand, Tony Judt provides us with a mirror image for Ash's explanation. Judt argues that liberal dissidents never had a strong impact on their societies, and that the region's procommunist illiberal traditions, enhanced by the lingering effects of Leninism, are a major obstacle for liberal democracy to thrive in the region. In this perspective, there is little usable past for the exponents of pluralism to hearken back to. Instead, there is a strong and unprocessed memory of real or perceived victimization, a lot of self-idealization, and very little readiness for empathy and commiseration.

However, if we look closer at the two arguments, we might be surprised to find that they are not as far apart as they seem. In *Postwar*, Tony Judt argued that

As Edmund Burke had dismissively observed of an earlier generation of revolutionary activists: 'The best were only men of theory.' Most of them [critical intellectuals] were quite unprepared for the messy political and technical issues of the coming decade [...] One of the reasons for the decline of the intellectuals was that their much remarked-upon emphasis on the *ethics* of anti-Communism, the need to construct a morally aware civil society to fill the anomic space between the individual and the state, had been overtaken by the practical business of constructing a market economy.²¹

Indeed the fragmented and disenchanted societies of the former Soviet bloc became a sort of quicksand for the ideas and discourses of

²⁰ T. Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 131–56.

²¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 695.

those who earlier had produced the delegitimization of the communist system. It seems that, in the void that was created after the demise of Sovietism, in the equally atavistic and brittle postmodern milieus of postcommunism the dissident message of accountability, civility, and the good society as the anti-Machiavellian *polis* got lost along the way. However, these statements do not suffice if another element is not taken into account. I am thinking here of the specific profile of postcommunist societies. Large sections of the population were born under communism and lived at least half of their life (or the formative years) during ‘really existing socialism.’ In other words, one constant in these communities are “the millions of Lilliputian threads of everyday mendacity, conformity and compromise” (T. Gordon Ash). The majority of people living in Eastern Europe have distinct personal histories before 1989; histories that are essentially altered by the (post)totalitarian experience. As Václav Klaus once put it in a presidential address: “Neither a former communist nor a former dissident; neither a henchman nor a moralist, whose very presence on the scene is a reminder of the courage you did not have: your bad conscience.”²²

Under the circumstances, one issue that stands out in most of the region’s countries is the problem of their unmastered totalitarian past. It has proven to be a formidable obstacle against establishing a lasting connection between democracy, memory, and civic activism. I consider that one can refashion both individual and collective identity on the basis of the negative lessons and *exempla* that national history can provide. Besides the trauma of the early Stalinist days, all the countries in question had and still have to deal with “the grey veil of moral ambiguity” (Tony Judt) that was the defining feature of really existing socialism. These societies and most of their members have a bad conscience in relation to the past. A new solidarity based upon the duty of remembrance is still *in situ*, but its nourishment has the potential of advancing political goals that lay beyond the priorities of the present murky, seemingly never-ending transitional period.

In 1997, a person who was the child of deportees during Stalin’s Great Terror (and spent his youth drifting from one orphanage to another) asked his interviewer the following question: “How can

²² Idem, 695–96.

someone be a victim of a regime that has not been officially declared criminal?”²³ Regardless of the civic initiatives and the scholarly production that have stressed, documented, and detailed the criminality (*Regierungskriminalität*) of communist regimes, we are a long way from a full domestic and international recognition of the misdeeds and wrong-doing perpetrated under Leninist rule. The former Soviet bloc has been struggling, to varying degrees, with a double crisis of history. To paraphrase Tony Judy, the *mis-memory* of communism led to a *mis-memory* of anticommunism:

On the one hand, cynicism and mistrust pervade all social, cultural and even personal exchanges, so that the construction of civil society, much less civil memory, is very, very difficult. On the other hand, there are multiple memories and historical myths, each of which has learned to think of itself as legitimate simply by virtue of being private and unofficial. Where these private or tribal versions come together, they form powerful counterhistories of a mutually antagonistic and divisive nature.²⁴

Both formal and informal amnesia, along with *hyperamnesia*, after 1989 estranged the lessons of the totalitarian past from the present, despite the fact that the former ought to be essential features of the latter. The unmastered past of the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe prevents these countries from institutionalizing the logical connection between democracy, memory, and militancy. Pastor Joachim Gauck, former chair of the authority dealing with the *Stasi* (east German secret police) files and currently President of Germany, argued that “reconciliation with the traumatic past can only be achieved not simply through grief, but also through discussion

²³ In *Algemeen Dagblad*, 1 November 1997: 1–2 *apud* Nanci Adler, “In Search of Identity: The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Recreation of Russia,” in Alexandra Barahona de Brito, Carmen González-Enríquez, and Paloma Aguilar, eds., *The Politics of Memory Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 289.

²⁴ Tony Judy, “The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe” in Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 173.

and dialogue.”²⁵ In this sense, Charles Villa-Vicencio, one of the main members of South Africa’s Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, defined reconciliation as “the operation whereby individuals and the community create for themselves a space in which they can communicate with one another, in which they can begin the arduous labor of understanding” a painful history. Hence, justice becomes a process of enabling the nation with the aid of a culture of responsibility.²⁶ When no *Aufarbeitung* (working through) takes place, the memory field is left for ‘alternative’ interpretations.

In this context, we need to underscore the fact that a new identity can be based upon negative contrasts: “on the one hand, with the past that is being repudiated; on the other, with anti-democratic political actors in the present (and/or potentially in the future).”²⁷ A new “anamnestic solidarity” would be based upon the ethical framework circumscribed by both the knowledge of the truth and the official acknowledgement of its history. The destructive power of silence and of un-assumed guilt would be pre-empted. This way, according to German political scientist Gesine Schwan, the fundamental abilities and values of individuals are nourished so as to sustain their well being, social behavior, and trust in communal life. The moral consensus over a shared experience of reality is thus preserved, making possible the democratic existence of the specific society.²⁸ Though some have argued along these lines, the topsy-turvie of various domestic debates about the national history in Eastern European countries more than showed that a collective communicative silence [*kommunikatives Beschweigen*] about the past can hardly be conducive,

²⁵ Joachim Gauck, “Dealing with the STASI Past,” 277–84 in *Daedalus* (*Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*) “Germany in Transition” (Winter 1994): 282–83.

²⁶ Charles Villa-Vicencio and Erik Doxtader eds., *Pieces of the Puzzle: Keywords on Reconciliation and Transitional Justice* (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2005), 34–38.

²⁷ Jan-Werner Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 97–119.

²⁸ Gesine Schwan, *Politics and Guilt: the Destructive Power of Silence*, translation by Thomas Dunlap (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 54–134.

during postcommunism, for the consolidation of functioning democracies.²⁹

The more inchoate and nebulous the past upon which post-communist polities were legitimized, the more aggressive, feverish, and intolerant were the proponents of neo-romantic mythologies. Nevertheless, Eastern Europe has the example and model of the West, where the process of democratization, of building sustainable postwar societies and transnational bonds, was fundamentally based upon coming to terms with the traumatic past. The flight from democracy can always be checked by conscientiousness about the consequences of radical evil in history. Therefore, the memory of both Auschwitz and the Gulag, if remembered and taught, can go a long way to the entrenchment of the societal values and the political culture destroyed in the region by twentieth-century totalitarianisms.

In this sense, the Prague Declaration (signed by people such as Václav Havel, Joachim Gauck, and Vytautas Landsbergis) and the OSCE's "Resolution on Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century" can be seen as the fulfillment of the second post-1989 stage of development in the region. If in the 1990s we could argue that the former communist countries sought the main road back to democracy, in the 2000s they have been seen trying to overcome self-centeredness in a united Europe. The two documents finally recognize that the new Europe is "bound together by the signs and symbols of its terrible past."³⁰ For example, the OSCE's resolution states that

Noting that in the twentieth century European countries experienced two major totalitarian regimes, Nazi and Stalinist, which brought about genocide, violations of human rights and freedoms, war crimes and crimes against humanity, acknowledging the uniqueness of the Holocaust [...] The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly reconfirms its united stand against all totalitarian rule from whatever ideological background [...] Urges the participating States: a. to continue research into and raise public aware-

²⁹ Herman Lübbe first employed this term in 1983 in order in reference Federal Germany's transition to democracy after 1945.

³⁰ Judt, *Postwar*, 831.

ness of the totalitarian legacy; b. to develop and improve educational tools, programs and activities, most notably for younger generations, on totalitarian history, human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, pluralism, democracy and tolerance; [...] Expresses deep concern at the glorification of the totalitarian regimes.³¹

The struggles that followed during postcommunism were fundamentally centered on the concepts of civility and accountability. Politics, culture, social relations: all were connected in one way or another to definitions of what it means to be a citizen. The immediate aftermath of 1989 showed us two possible paths to follow: one where the revolutions succeeded in instilling a sustainable sense of civic belonging; and those cases where the revolutions themselves were temporarily sidetracked and even negated, aborted or abducted. All in all, it seems that Ralf Dahrendorf's synthetic formula, "citizens in search of meaning," remains brilliantly enduring. The crucial challenge after 1989 was that of successfully (or at least satisfactorily) building a moral and political consensus based on shared trust in accountable institutions and predictable procedures.

In 1989, public demonstrations did not lead directly to the collapse of the communist elites in power. Maybe the civil society was not the immediate cause of the demise of Honecker, Jaruzelski, Zhivkov, or Husak. But the dynamics, the ideas and, most impor-

³¹ "Vilnius declaration of the OSCE parliamentary assembly and resolutions adopted at the eighteenth annual session" (Vilnius, 29 June to 3 July 2009), http://www.oscepa.org/images/stories/documents/activities/1. Annual%20Session/2009_Vilnius/Final_Vilnius_Declaration_ENG.pdf. The Prague Declaration and the OSCE Resolution are hardly singular. Other official, pan-European or trans-Atlantic have been made to condemn the criminality of Communism /Stalinism following the example of the criminalization of Fascism/Nazism. For example, the EU Parliament's resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism or the building of the Victims of Communism Memorial in Washington, D.C. The monument was dedicated by President George W. Bush on Tuesday, June 12, 2007. June 12 was chosen because it was the twentieth anniversary of President Ronald Reagan's famous Brandenburg Gate speech. See <http://www.globalmuseum-moncommunism.org/voc>.

tantly, the aftermath of the events accompanying the shattering of the communist parties' rule across the region cannot be understood without an emphasis on the significance of civil society as a set of fundamental ideas, a political myth, and a real, historical movement that accompanied the implosion of Eastern European party-states. To take my point even further: the very idea of the revolutions in 1989 rests on the impact of civil society, for it was the latter rather than the uncivil society that replaced the existent form of political, social and economic system with another founded on the ideals of democratic citizenship and human rights. Yes, there were many masks and myths involved in the events that took place in Bucharest, Prague, and Sofia. In most countries, the resilience of the old elites prevented a radical coming to terms with the Communist past. On the other hand, those who took to the streets, the thousands and thousands who were ready to die because they wanted to be free, did not act as the puppets of uncivil society. They believed in civility, decency and humanity, and they succeeded in rehabilitating these values. This is the most significant lesson of 1989.

Part One

THE MEMORY AND LEGACY
OF 1989

GALE STOKES

Purposes of the Past

History is not a thing, an objective reality that is revealed through study, contemplation, or ecstatic inspiration, as so many nationalists appear to believe. It is a human construct. All history writing or speaking, all memory for that matter, is shaped by the framework of its time and by the purposes of its creators. Thus it is important to know who is producing a historical narrative, and for what purposes. What academics consider “proper history,” as Aviezer Tucker puts it, is that which has been agreed upon by “an uncoerced, large, and uniquely heterogeneous community of historians.”¹ This kind of history is amenable to modification through the introduction of new evidence, a change in the interpretation of existing evidence, or the introduction of a new set of values. Tucker contrasts this scientific history with what he calls “therapeutic history,” which is typically propagated within a homogeneous community that resists changes to its standardized version, and often backs up its interpretations by threats and accusations against those who question it. The idea behind therapeutic history is not to identify truth (although that is usually the claim of those practicing it), but rather to make those who profess or follow it feel relevant, recognized, or innocent. It is prone to conspiracy theories that absolve the favored community on whose behalf the history is produced from responsibility for notorious or dreadful events that took place in the past.

¹ Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47.

In the immediate aftermath of 1989, some believed that the collapse of public order in Eastern Europe² might mean that a return to the dominance of therapeutic history was imminent; that Eastern Europe would shortly be rent by vicious nationalist rhetoric and possibly even a return to fascist solutions.³ A completely opposite view was put forward by Francis Fukuyama in his famous, or perhaps notorious, book, *The End of History and the Last Man*.⁴ One of Fukuyama's points was that the two great political and social experiments of the twentieth century, Nazism and Communism, failed, leaving the third experiment, which I call pluralism and he called liberal democracy, standing. I think this is an accurate statement of what happened, but a fundamental misunderstanding of Fukuyama's work is the perception that this was his main point; that the book was merely a triumphalist justification of Ronald Reagan, neo-conservatism, and the Washington Consensus. I do not think this is correct. "To equate Western liberal

² I find Sorin Antohi's justification for the use of the term "Eastern Europe" useful: "In this text, 'Eastern Europe' is shorthand for the 'region formerly known as Eastern Europe.' It includes approximate symbolic-geographical (sub)regions such as Central Europe, South Eastern Europe, [and] Eastern Europe. More technically, Eastern Europe has come to mean the former Soviet Union area. While this book only covers six countries from Central and South-Eastern Europe, we decided to use as a common descriptor the less precise, but more evocative and less cumbersome phrase, 'Eastern Europe.'" I do the same. Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi, and Péter Apor, eds., *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2007), xxi.

³ "[M]ost of those who did make predictions [immediately after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe] saw a dark future. The rise of virulent, angry nationalism was forecast by more than one expert. Others foresaw the rise of anti-Semitism and the growth of neo-Nazism, Germany was going to become 'the Fourth Reich.'" Anne Applebaum, "After the Wall fell: Central Europe's success deserves more attention," *Washington Post* (November 9, 2009), A17.

⁴ 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 2006). Fukuyama's original article, which created an uproar, is "The End of History?" *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18. For many years a stalwart of neo-conservatism, Fukuyama became disillusioned by the policies of George W. Bush and in 2006 wrote that "I can no longer support" neoconservatism (*America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006], xi). In the presidential election of 2008, he supported Barack Obama.

democracy with the Reagan-era antigovernment ideology,” John Ikenberry and Daniel Deudney write, not only does an “injustice to the protean character of the liberal mode” but also fails to acknowledge the richness of Fukuyama’s effort to find a theory of world development that matches both philosophical and factual criteria.⁵

In fact, Fukuyama does not make the politically charged point that Ronald Reagan’s aggressive military build-up in his first term defeated communism and that liberal capitalism was therefore triumphant. Nor does he argue, as many do, that economic growth created a middle class whose demands would lead to democracy in other parts of the world. And finally, he does not think that instituting free elections would lead to the implementation of a market system in developing countries. What he is trying to do, I think, is to find a way to understand the enormous changes that globalization has brought and is still bringing to the world. He is trying to find extra-historical standards by which to analyze political systems. In doing so, he postulates that such systems need to perform two fundamental functions: the first is to provide for security and physical survival, and second is to respond to the basic human need to be recognized, to be seen by others as authentic, as having value. For Fukuyama, liberal democracy meets both of these conditions. It combines capitalism’s ability to satisfy an ever-expanding basket of physical and psychic needs – even while purposefully creating those needs – with democracy, which, by declaring that all men are created equal and providing a mechanism for that equality to be expressed politically, answers the need for recognition. Fukuyama does not think that pluralism has solved all problems for all time. In fact, he believes that liberal democracy contains a fatal flaw in the long run because it promises an equality among human beings that in fact does not exist. There will always be people who are not satisfied with mere equality but who want to excel and be recognized for their power or riches. Nevertheless, since the combination of capitalism and democracy comes closer than any previous system to providing pleasure (consumption-capitalism) and recognition (equality-democracy), Fukuyama argues that at the moment there are no theoretically

⁵ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, “The Myth of the Autocratic Revival: Why Liberal Democracy Will Prevail,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 86, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2009): 77–93.

plausible alternatives to pluralism, and that it will continue its spread throughout the world.

This does not mean that historians would have no more events to investigate, or that all the world's states would become liberal democracies. Indeed, Fukuyama believed that much of the world will remain in what he called the realm of history, in which leaders fight for territory, prestige, and power as they always have. But significant parts of the world, especially but not exclusively Europe, have passed beyond that kind of military and physical struggle into a realm of post-history. That is, by adopting liberal democratic economic and political structures these areas have moved to a new and more stable style of large-scale human interaction in which diversity, change, negotiation, compromise, and economic competition have replaced warfare as the primary mode of international relations. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of this development. Whatever faults the EU might have, its great accomplishment has been to avoid war among its members.⁶ Not only that, but it has organized itself in such a way that almost precludes the outbreak of the kind of wars that have been Europe's constant companion from time immemorial. The most important European development over the past seventy years is not so much what happened, but what did not happen—a repetition of the massive bloodlettings that devastated the continent in the past.⁷ In Fukuyama's terms, international politics in Europe has moved from the realm of history to the realm of post-history.

Fukuyama's work has been roundly criticized. For example, in 2002 Vladimir Tismaneanu, upset with the lack of progress toward

⁶ James J. Sheehan, *Where Have all the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008). See also James J. Sheehan, "The Transformation of Europe and the End of the Cold War," in Jeffrey A. Engel ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36–68.

⁷ Mary Kaldor has argued that the very nature of warfare has changed in a globalized world. See her *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). Also of interest; Malcolm Potts and Thomas Hayden, *Sex and War: How Biology Explains Warfare and Terrorism and Offers a Path to a Safer World* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2008) and Spencer R. Weart, *Never at War: Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

democracy in Romania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, sharply criticized what he called the “neo-Hegelian” game “of ultimate liberal triumph.”⁸ More recently Robert Kagan argued in *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* that Fukuyama was simply wrong, that the international order is turning back to the historical world, that is, to the world of great power politics.⁹ Kagan writes that at least two major powers, China and Russia, but especially China, are demonstrating that it might be possible to meet human needs in a similarly expansive way as does capitalism, but with a non-democratic governmental structure. Their success in this kind of state capitalism might not only provide a viable model to nations not yet firmly rooted in the democratic camp, but might also mean a return to a world-wide balance of power politics as practiced in the nineteenth century. For Kagan, therefore, Fukuyama’s idea of a post-historical future is nothing more than a fanciful dream, which developments in the real world are not bearing out. Ikenberry and Deudney, among others, dispute this claim, turning the tables on Kagan’s “dream” by calling his return of history a “myth,” and claiming that there is indeed no alternative to liberal democracy in the long run.¹⁰ It is impossible to say who is right here, because we cannot know the future of the history of the world; we cannot know whether liberal democracy is the inevitable pathway, or whether authoritarian states can sustain themselves in a globalized economy. Indeed, it is more likely that a variety of solutions will coexist, such as that proposed by Mark Leonard: 1) the United States striving for a balance of power favoring democracy; 2) an axis of sover-

⁸ As quoted by Robin Okey, *The Demise of Communist East Europe: 1989 in Context* (London: Arnold, 2004), 172.

⁹ New York: Vintage Books, 2009. For a summary article, see Robert Kagan, “The End of the End of History,” *The New Republic* (April 23, 2008): 40–47. See also Ian Bremmer, *The End of the Free Market: Who Wins the War Between States and Corporations?* (New York: Portfolio, 2010). Bremmer documents the strengths of state capitalism.

¹⁰ In addition to Ikenberry and Deudney, see Azar Gat, “The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 86, no.4 (July/Aug 2007): 59–69; Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, “How Development Leads to Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 86, no. 2 (May/Apr 2009): 33–48; and Andrew J. Bacevich, “Present at the Re-Creation: A Neoconservative Moves On,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 87, no. 4 (Jul/Aug 2008): 125–131.

eignty in which Russia and China see multilateral institutions as protection from western interference but remain autocratic; 3) a Middle Eastern zone of faith; and 4) the Eurosphere, held together by principles of multilateralism and international law.¹¹ And it is certain that even within the European Union the still sovereign member states will compete for advantage, albeit without resorting to war. Still, wherever events may take us, in the medium to long range there are no plausible alternatives in Europe to pluralism and its insistence on democracy, diversity, and human rights.

What does this turn call for? Every nation needs a history, and all nations have proven capable of providing historical justifications for their right to be recognized as authentic, sovereign, unique, and admirable. In the very first moments after 1989, the new direction seemed fairly unproblematic. All that was needed, it seemed, was to get rid of the false histories put forward by the communist regimes and restore the true pluralist histories of the various peoples of the region. East Europeans began to create narratives of their own that would assure their existence in an already existing worldwide system of nation states.¹² But the question quickly emerged as to whether the required history would be scientific or primarily therapeutic. Unfortunately, as Vladimir Tismaneanu has pointed out ten years ago in *Fantasies of Salvation*, much of the history produced in the first years of the transition from communism to pluralism was of the latter type.¹³ The need

¹¹ Mark Leonard, *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005). See also <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.com/2007/01/world-in-2020-by-mark-leonard-by-2020.html>, from which this list was taken. (Accessed September 30, 2009).

¹² For excellent reviews of post-communist historiography in the region, most of which is “constituted in the context of a broad national agenda,” see Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., *(Re)Writing History: Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004); and Antohi et al., *Narratives Unbound*. The quotation is from Ivan Elenkov and Daniela Koleve, “Historical Studies in Post-Communist Bulgaria: Between Academic Standards and Political Agendas,” in Antohi et al., 409. For the GDR, see Catherine Epstein, “East Germany and its History Since 1989,” *Journal of Modern History* vol. 75, no. 3 (September 2003): 634–61.

¹³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

to readjust the past from its class orientation to a national orientation produced an enormous number of aggressive national manifestos and histories, often for narrow political purposes and opposed to the principles of democracy, tolerance, and human rights that form the bedrock of the European project. Of course, there is nothing new about histories written or proclaimed to support narrow, even reactionary, political ends. Written history has always been political, and even academic historians more often than not have purveyed interpretations that match with certain political or ideological positions. In the East European vacuum without a center, as Tismaneanu called it, all sorts of mythologies were woven, so that in the sudden ecstasy of freedom characteristic of the immediate post-1989 space, history did not seem to be returning anywhere, but rather spinning out of control.

Perhaps this is the reason that in the last decade, all the governments of Eastern Europe have established institutes of various kinds in an effort to control the adjustments they feel are necessary to their national past. The lustration issue, while not over, is fading as time takes its toll, and in its place are emerging institutions like the Bulgarian Institute for the Study of the Recent Past, the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, the Hungarian Terror House, the Polish Museum of the Warsaw Uprising, and many others. These centers usually claim to be scientific endeavors, seeking to preserve evidence, investigate it, and present its findings to the public. And often they do provide useful services. But because all of these centers depend on government support, they are susceptible to political pressure to arrive at therapeutic rather than scientific interpretations. When an institution like the Polish Institute of National Remembrance employs approximately 1500 persons working in offices large and small throughout the country, it begins to remind one of various institutes for the study of the working class or the national liberation struggle that characterized the previous regimes.¹⁴

¹⁴ On this institute, as well as others in Poland, see Izabella Main, "How is Communism Displayed? Exhibitions and Museums of Communism in Poland," in Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor, eds., *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 371–400.

The reason that these efforts are so political is because in a world of nation states, establishing the national narrative is not a merely scientific endeavor undertaken by educated scholars. Quite the opposite. Creating a national mythology that serves a unifying or even therapeutic purpose is essential to creating a state that will be recognized as an authentic member of the worldwide state system. Fukuyama believes that democracy answers the individual's need for recognition, and in a sense it does, but nationalism meets that same need on a communal level. Indeed, the very term for international acceptance into the community of authentic peoples is "recognition." The European Union "recognized" Croatia and Slovenia early in 1992. Therefore, Croats and Slovenes became bona fide members of the world community, able to participate on a formally equal basis with all other recognized states. This kind of communal recognition is the goal of most identity-based movements that do not already have their own states.

This goal has a certain functionality: one cannot aspire to enter the post-historical world of the European Union without first having established one's own national statehood. The EU is, after all, a union of nation states, each of which retains a significant amount of autonomy. But paradoxically, once one is a member of the EU, the emphasis suddenly shifts. The aggressive, self-centered weaving of one's own past that had the practical function of unifying various subsets into a coherent nation is no longer as functional in the international arena as it used to be. Charles Maier puts it this way: "Bounded space no longer appears a decisive resource; it is a problematic basis for collective political security and increasingly irrelevant to economic activity."¹⁵ Of course one has to maintain one's sense of self, one's "landscape of memory," as Maier puts it. But now the excesses, the extremist byways, the rantings and falsehoods that seem to be part and parcel of nationalist rhetoric have become increasingly dysfunctional, a colossal waste of time. What worked to define one's space in the historical world no longer works as well in achieving one's goals in the post-historical world, where economic policy, negotiation, and accommodation have an increased value.

¹⁵ Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* vol. 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 823.

Narrow territorial or national histories face other problems as well in authenticating their countries' place in the European orbit. One of these is the difference in the long-term historical development between the Atlantic states that actually invented pluralism – both capitalism and democracy – and the continental states that did not participate directly in this process. Most East European countries can match west Europeans with tales of their medieval, or even earlier, ancestry. Serbian nationalists can claim, for example, that the Ottoman Yoke stifled the green shoots of the nation until the lifting of that yoke permitted modern Serbia to emerge, much in the same way as the Whig Theory of History in England claimed that English democracy originated in the forests of Germany, suffering under the Norman Yoke until it emerged triumphant in the modern world. Discredited though such theories may be among academics, ethnogenesis remains part and parcel of the everyday politics of nationalism. Every country in Eastern Europe has produced, and continues to produce, histories in this parochial mode. But it is much more difficult for East Europeans to claim participation in the long-term emergence of pluralism that characterizes the history of the Atlantic countries.¹⁶ In other words, their myths of origin do not have the same salience for liberal democracy as those of the Atlantic world they joined when they entered the EU.¹⁷ Indeed, much of the more extreme nationalist rhetoric of the last twenty years has focused instead on the fascist ideology of the 1930s, drawing its racism and anti-democratic virulence from the already failed experiments of those years. So from the point of view of historical continuity, it is not entirely accurate to say that Eastern Europeans are *returning* to Europe, if by that we mean to capitalism, democracy, and pluralism, since they were never an integral part of that Europe.

¹⁶ Although they are trying. For example, István Rév notes the “countless attempts after 1989 of constructing a new Middle Ages in all the East and Central European countries” (“The Man in the White Raincoat,” in Sarkisova and Apor, *Past for the Eyes*, 31).

¹⁷ As Vladimir Tismaneanu puts it, “very few of these countries can invoke serious and reliable liberal traditions. Instead of being the outcome of natural growth, modernity was experienced as an externally induced shock” (*Fantasies of Salvation*, 48).

But curiously, the “true origins” of the European Union, that voluntary, peaceful, economically integrated structure with its strong emphasis on human rights, only dates from the late 1940s, not earlier. The modern European project actually constitutes a rejection of the continent’s pre-World War II past.¹⁸ It is true that the Atlantic countries created Fukuyama’s liberal democracy, but they also created imperialism, a vicious kind of slavery, racism, and a particularly devastating kind of warfare to which they do not wish to return. It was only by contemplating this catastrophic history that a handful of European public figures found the strength to form what became the European Union. That is, it was only when World War II demonstrated the terrible costs of remaining in the realm of history that Europe found a way to transition into post-history.

In Western Europe, 1945 was a moment of liberation and creative institution building. In fact, the division of Europe into East and West after 1948 almost certainly helped make the Treaty of Rome that created the European Community possible. The first six members of the community were not burdened with questions of military security, which was guaranteed by the United States, or how to integrate countries like Poland, Hungary, or Romania. They could go ahead on their own. But in Eastern Europe, the short-lived liberation from Nazism in 1945 was quickly overwhelmed by a new kind of oppression, Stalinism. The East European countries were not freed, and they could not work out their destinies on their own. Today, east of the river Elbe only Russia celebrates 1945 as an inspiring and victorious culmination of the Great Fatherland War, and even this is not considered a moment of creation, but rather of restoration.

If 1945 cannot be the same kind of liberating moment for Eastern Europe as it is for Western Europe, how about 1989? Was it really a revolution? No one doubts that the events of 1989 were truly remarkable. It was a combination of elites and masses conspired to peacefully overthrow an entrenched bureaucratic system in a broad geographical

¹⁸ “Despite its ancient roots, much of what we know today of modern Europe arose only sixty years ago from the ashes of the most destructive war humans had ever known” (Steven Hill, *Europe’s Promise: Why the European Way is the Best Hope in an Insecure Age* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010], 16).

space. It was, as Timothy Garton Ash puts it, perhaps Europe's best year.¹⁹ There is little doubt too that the entire socio-political system of almost all the countries of Eastern Europe has changed dramatically. Political style, workplace ethics, behavioral norms, the sense of time, and many other things have changed dramatically. Surely this constituted a major rupture with the past. And yet, the changes of 1989 did not initiate something new, such as the Anglo-American, French, or Bolshevik revolutions. Nor was it violent. No civil wars, no beheadings, no starvation. The classic revolutions, which are still looked at for inspiration in the countries they occurred, were violent game-changers. They placed transformational ideas on the political agenda and they did so with blood. The mobilized masses of 1989 did not propose anything new and they did it by way of velvet revolutions (of course, with the exception of the Romania). People tend to value things obtained at great cost. Thus perhaps the most surprising and wonderful feature of the rupture of 1989 – its peaceful nature—is at the same time one of the reasons it has not left behind a powerful mythology. In Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall still has resonance; in good measure, because it led to the reuniting of Germany into the most powerful state on the continent. But elsewhere, 1989 has become the so-called revolution, or the November events, or the moment “when nothing changed.”

Instead of focusing on the significant changes, both positive and negative, that the revolutions of 1989 made possible, or on the suitability of its past for the new world conditions, each country has emphasized its own neuralgic points. Both scientific and therapeutic propagators of history have sought out the great moments in their countries' recent past as a way of overcoming the burden of two generations of a socialist past. Hungarians often focus on the Revolt (or Revolution, or Uprising) of 1956, while in the Czech Republic the Prague Spring receives attention, and in Poland it is the Solidarity Movement that takes centre stage. In all three cases, participants in the events and their supporters have produced accounts that exhibit considerable sophistication in describing their actions and motivations, while at the same time authenticating these motivations. But the open-

¹⁹ Timothy Garton Ash, “1989!” *New York Review of Books*, vol. 57, no. 17 (November 5, 2009).

ness to heterogeneity so characteristic of pluralism has opened up the ability of interested parties to create diverse versions of these events. For example, critics of the heroic interpretation of opposition to communism argue that in all three above-mentioned cases, when push came to shove, the reformers and dissidents of the communist period were too willing to find ways to accommodate their communist antagonists.²⁰ These critics often argue this happened, in part, because many of the most important dissidents began their careers as leftists, or came from elite communist families, and therefore could not be really true to the national interest.²¹ Surprisingly, in recent years this kind of knee-jerk anti-communism, which one would have thought would diminish with the almost complete disappearance of actual communists, has increased as the right attacks its political enemies on the basis of their alleged left-leaning proclivities. In other words, in the new conditions of liberal democracy, the romantic and even heroic certainties of the cold war period – namely that the Hungarian Uprising, the Prague Spring, and the Solidarity Movement were uniquely positive events because they attacked and undermined Soviet power – have themselves become contested.

This kind of resetting of cold war certainties is not unknown in other parts of Europe. In Germany, for example, reconsideration of the expulsion or movement of millions of Germans from Eastern Europe back to Germany at the end of World War II has been going on for some years. At first the province of relatively small groups of expellees, by now the *Vertreibung* movement has led to an increasing sense among Germans that the expulsion, along with intense allied bombing of German cities during World War II, were crimes against humanity. Advocates of this view do not deny the horror of the Holocaust, or that Hitler was evil, but they insist that those who were considered in the cold war era almost unequivocally positive, such as Winston Churchill,

²⁰ Of course it was precisely that willingness to accommodate that made the peaceful transformations of 1989 possible and in the long run make stable democracy possible.

²¹ On the importance of generations in Eastern Europe, see Marci Shore's brilliant article, "(The End of) Communism as a Generational History: Some Thoughts on Czechoslovakia and Poland," *Contemporary European History* vol. 18, no. 3 (2009): 303–29.

were in some sense war criminals. The *Vertreibung* movement is a type of therapeutic history. The question is not whether their claims are true or not, or what might be the subtleties of the issues they bring to light. Their purpose is to assuage the still powerful feelings of unease about German responsibilities during World War II, as well as perhaps gain some compensation for the heirs of the expellees. In other words, there is nothing particularly “eastern” about the re-evaluation of formerly heroic figures and movements, although it remains true that such interpretations often tend to fall into the category of therapeutic rather than scientific history.

The efforts of the center-right to control the past are at least relatively respectable.²² Further to the right are groups like *Obraz* and *Srpski narodni pokret 1389* in Serbia, *Jobbik* in Hungary, *România Mare* in Romania, or *Ataka* in Bulgaria that align themselves with the most radical, neo-Nazi, and anti-Semitic parties in Europe. These groups see their mission as preventing the despoiling of the alleged purity of their own people from the worldwide conspiracy of globalizing bureaucrats. As the English-language website of Jobbik puts it, “In order to survive globalization people have to know their true history, otherwise [they will] lose their histories as the global elite has been conducting a clandestine war on national cultures.”²³ In 2009 Jobbik held no seats in the Hungarian parliament, so some observers were shocked when the party took about 17 percent of the popular vote in the parliamentary elections of 2010. The same might be said for the success of Ataka in Bulgaria, which in 2010 held 20 seats in the Bulgarian legislature. But these successes, and the success of center-right parties throughout the region,

²² Charles Maier argues that the recent efflorescence of right wing activity may well be simply a swing of the pendulum from those who believe that fulfillment is measured in individuals and families, which dominated the early post-1989 years in the form of neo-liberalism, to those who find fulfillment through a community of belonging and common action, worrisome perhaps, but analytically to be expected (Charles Maier, “What Have we Learned since 1989,” *Contemporary European History*, vol. 18, no. 3 [2009]: 269).

²³ Interestingly enough, this statement is made in relation to Jobbik’s insistence that a commission be formed to verify that the ancient origin of Hungarians is Hun-Scythian, and not Finno-Ugric, a designation that Jobbik claims was “concocted by German linguists.” <http://www.jobbik.com/europe-news/3100.html> (accessed September 28, 2009).

need to be put in perspective. The far right has suffered losses as well. In the Czech Republic the constitutional court approved the banning of the neo-Nazi Workers' Party for inciting national, racial, ethnic, and social intolerance. In Romania, România Mare held 126 seats in parliament in 2000. In the elections of late 2008 it was not able to pass the threshold and took no seats in the new parliament.²⁴ In Serbia, after legislation in 2005 banned discrimination in the workplace on the basis sexual orientation, hoodlum elements from the right have protested vigorously. In 2010, for example, downtown Belgrade suffered serious damage from a crowd of some 6000 riotous young men who unsuccessfully tried to disrupt a gay rights parade. The significant part of the event was the firmness with which the Serbian government protected the parade, arresting many of the protestors and pursuing investigations into the legality of organizations like *Obraz* and 1389.

Since all of these parties are anti-Semitic, it is useful also to look at some signs of the decline of official anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe. Perhaps the most telling example is Romania. Under severe pressure from the European Union, the Romanian government has adopted official steps to recognize the Holocaust and Romania's role in it. In 2004, Romanian president Ion Iliescu broke with a long national tradition by establishing a commission headed by native son Elie Wiesel to investigate Romania's role in the Holocaust. When the commission confirmed the gravity of its implication in this historical tragedy, Iliescu, doubtlessly with an eye toward relations with the EU, called Romania's participation in the Holocaust a "shameful chapter in our recent past [that] must be neither forgotten nor minimized."²⁵

²⁴ This result may have been caused in part by changes in Romania's electoral law, which Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Romania Mare's leader, characterized as gerrymandering. See Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea, "The Romanian Elections of 2008," *Problems of Post-Communism* vol. 56, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2009): 47–61. Stan and Vancea do not see the 2008 election as significantly changing corrupt character of Romanian politics, but Vladimir Tismaneanu argues that "Romania is now a consolidated democracy" ("Romanian Parliamentary Elections: New Alliances and Challenges," *EES News* [East European Studies, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars] [March/April 2009]: 5–6, 11).

²⁵ Michael Shafir, "Romanian President Puts 'Shameful!' Holocaust Episode to Rest," *RFE/RL Newsline* (October 13, 2004).

October 9 has been designated Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Elie Wiesel Institute for Studying the Holocaust in Romania is now operating, the Holocaust is supposed to be taught in Romanian schools, and Holocaust denial is against the law. Of course anti-Semitism has not disappeared in Romania; far from it. But for the first time in the history of the country, the governmental apparatus has taken a formal stand against it; a marked contrast to the situation of the 1930s. In Poland, there has been a substantial revival of interest in Jewish Studies. Konstanty Gebert, a Polish journalist, says that “the country has undergone a serious moral transformation in the wake of the Jedwabne debate, [which was] stunningly profound and stunningly courageous.”²⁶ Among other things, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which plans to open in 2012, has launched its “virtual Shtetl” website. This open-source project identifies almost 1,000 former Jewish settlements and solicits viewers to add information they may have, including photographs, letters or other memorabilia, about any shtetl that might interest them. As Jerzy Halbersztadt, Director of the museum, puts it, “Anti-Semitism is no longer an issue particular to us in daily life.”²⁷ In Hungary, *The Economist* recently noted that “anti-Semitism is not part of the political dialogue” any more.²⁸ None of these things means that anti-Semitism has disappeared in Eastern Europe, just as it has not disappeared elsewhere. However, these signals suggest that while neo-Nazi fringe parties continue to exist and personal attitudes remain in place, they do not represent the mainstream of public discourse. After all, both the British National Party and the National Front in France won seats in the European parliament early in 2009, and yet it does not appear likely that either British or French democracy is in danger.

²⁶ Konstanty Gebert and Irina Maryniak, “Table Talk,” from www.europzine.com (September 30, 2009. Accessed October 1, 2009). “Jedwabne” refers to the controversy sparked off by Jan Gross’s book *Neighbors*, in which Gross described a moment when Poles in the small village of Jedwabne massacred Jews early in World War II.

²⁷ *New York Times*, April 9, 2009, “Poland Searches its own Soul,” article starting on p. C1.

²⁸ January 30, 2009.

Still, there is a struggle between the forces of history, in Fukuyama's sense, represented politically by the parties of the center-right and radical right, and those, probably a significant but relatively quiet majority, who wish to be part of a cosmopolitan Europe. The former lean toward therapeutic history, insisting that their putatively homogeneous nation has followed a clear pathway to its unique identity that is threatened by the forces of diversity, human rights, and globalization, while the latter realize that diversity is the new mode of international integration. The latter do not deny that their nation has its own history, but they see it as constructed, amenable to critique, and alive in its vitality. They understand, as many on the right do not, that in order to participate fully in the riches, both economic and cultural, of the globalizing world, they must in the long run accept the fact that human beings are, as James Madison put it, "contentious."²⁹ This obvious and uncontroversial fact of difference is exactly what liberal governments take into account; it is also the reason why single-issue identity politics can never provide a template for global politics. But taking the latter reason into account, there is little chance that either of these two positions will decisively win the day. Instead, each position will work out its own amalgam in an ongoing battle. This process is at a very early stage in Eastern Europe, where even the most stable countries have been a part of the European Union for fewer than ten years. Since it is difficult to find a good starting point for the new situation—1918 no longer works, nor does 1945, and 1989 has not retained its resonance—East European countries are in the first stages of creating new myths of origin. In years to come, maybe in the distant future, entry into the European Union, and not 1989, may come to be seen as the moment when a new kind of national direction was initiated that did, in fact, bring Eastern Europe into Europe. A generation after what we thought was the beginning, Eastern Europe stands at the actual beginning, the first years of the new experience of membership in the world community that in time will generate its own historical mythology.

²⁹ John Hume put it this way in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998: "Difference is not a threat, difference is natural.... The answer to difference is to respect it." Quoted by Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, updated and expanded (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 53.

This leads to the final question, namely, what is the historical significance of 1989? Vladimir Tismaneanu has argued recently that the revolutions of 1989 were of world-historical significance because of the positive principles of civil society, tolerance and democracy they represented.³⁰ He contrasted these views with the legacies of Leninism, in which small minorities consider themselves “carriers of a universal emancipatory mission” and thus feel justified in imposing their rule. In Tismaneanu’s reading, 1989 is significant because for the first time in European history, uncoerced and essentially leaderless masses of ordinary citizens in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and East Germany found a way to exercise power in a positive way. A similar moment of mobilization happened in Europe in 1848, but those revolutions ended in disappointment, whereas 1989 ended in hope. There is no denying the power of these points. But I am not so sure they lend the events of 1989 world-historical significance, except perhaps only as an inspirational model. Clearly globalization, as the lessening of the significance of bounded territory, has been the characteristic socio-political phenomenon of the past forty or so years, a truly world-historical cascade of events. In a way, the cold war inhibited the unfolding of this process. As Amartya Sen put it, “The Berlin Wall . . . was a way of preventing a kind of global view of our future.”³¹ The collapse of communism broke that roadblock, and this may turn out to be its main significance.

At the same time the end of the cold war marked the end of traditional colonialism. “It is easy,” writes Odd Arne Westad, “to see the Cold War in the [Southern hemisphere] as a continuation of European colonial intervention and of European attempts at controlling Third World peoples.”³² The southern hemisphere remains a subject of European and American interest, but that interest is increasingly expressed through transnational entities such as the IMF, the World

³⁰ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences,” *Contemporary European History* vol. 18, no. 3 (2009): 271–88. For an argument that civil society had nothing to do with the revolutions of 1989, except perhaps in Poland, see Stephen Kotkin, with a contribution by Jan T. Gross, *Uncivil Society*.

³¹ As quoted by Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat*, 53.

³² Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

Bank, the WTO and thousands of NGOs rather than directly by the United States and the Soviet Union. In other words, the long-term significance of the cold war era for a majority of the world's population may well not be the overwhelming struggle between two superpowers that almost everyone in the United States and the Soviet Union thought it was. In many parts of the world, it may be remembered as simply the final phase of a certain kind of imperialism left over from the nineteenth century, an anachronism, even a temporary roadblock to the underlying wave of transnational interactions that characterizes the contemporary world.³³

In Europe itself, the cold war, especially its early years, may turn out to be seen in the long run as the environment that made it possible to create the innovative political and economic structure that ended war there as an instrument of public policy. In this interpretation, 1989, as the end of the cold war, could be understood not as a world-historical event at all, but as simply another milestone in the development of Europe's most important political invention of modern times. In all three of these larger scenarios—removing a roadblock to globalization, ending traditional colonialism, and permitting Eastern Europe to enter post-history—1989 becomes less a revolutionary moment and more an enabling moment that cleared the deck for underlying processes to proceed toward whatever lies ahead.

And what does lie ahead? Whether one believes that globalization is a positive, liberating phenomenon, or a crushing of ordinary people in the name of transnational bureaucracies, those who propagate history in Eastern Europe will have to start taking into account the fact that they are now living in a post-historical world. In other words, Eastern Europe is not returning to history, but setting out on a new voyage in which the uniqueness of each individual country's past will have to find its place in a diverse and interconnected world.

³³ Mary Elise Serotte argues that is “an oversimplification to consider the Cold War to be merely a coda to colonialism” (1989: *The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009], 13). I agree that the cold war was vitally important to those in the northern hemisphere, not “merely” a coda to colonialism; but I doubt that it was perceived in the quite the same way in Indonesia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

This is not entirely unlike the experience of west European historians in the fifty years that followed World War II. At first, they returned to inward-looking national discourses, and this style of writing history is still strong. But, as Stefan Berger has pointed out, starting about twenty years after the end of the war they found it increasingly difficult “to defend the national past as an autonomous space.” In time this led to the creation of “more pluralistic, tolerant, and open forms of national identity.”³⁴ As Eastern Europe increasingly integrates itself into the transnational world, perhaps this is what we can expect from its next generation of history producers.

³⁴ Stefan Berger, “A Return to the National Paradigm? National History Writing in Germany, Italy, France, and Britain from 1945 to the Present,” *Journal of Modern History* vol. 77, no. 3 (September 2005): 649 and 675. Further: “My story is not one of an upward trajectory where historians traveled from amnesia, repression, and mythology to critique and historical accuracy. Rather I would emphasize both the stability and resilience of national historical discourses and the instability and fluidity of particular variants of these national historical discourses. In some respects none of the four historiographies discussed here has moved substantially beyond a national agenda.... Yet, in other respects, this national agenda has become far more contested and controversial...[F]rom the 1960s onward, one can observe a genuine pluralization of national identity discourses in historical text production” (677).

AGNES HELLER

Twenty Years After 1989

The Soviet system collapsed twenty years ago. For my generation this happened just yesterday, but for the generation of my grandchildren it is already history. To write about it, I need to combine personal experience with historical analysis.

The collapse of the communist regime was the last great turning point in the history of the twentieth century. As so many analysts emphasized throughout the years, the twentieth century began with the original sin of World War I and terminated in 1989. In that *annus mirabilis* the whole world changed. There were no more totalitarian dictatorships or any kind of dictatorship in Europe. Democracy had won its greatest victory since 1945. The great hopes of 1945 were finally fulfilled. The map of the world was redrawn both literally and symbolically. Some spoke about the end of history in Hegelian terms. The sky was blue during the day, and stars were bright during the night. Or so the story went, for in reality matters were far from the expectations brought forth by the exhilarating events of 1989.

This paper will not report of great triumphs; neither will it bemoan betrayed hopes. There is no cause for triumph, since in the place of the old, new totalitarian states emerged, and the world has to face new, unforeseen dangers. There is no reason to speak about betrayed hopes, because all political hopes will be betrayed if they are inflated. I will speak about the years of 1989–91 first by way of mapping out their impact upon various postcommunist states in Central Eastern Europe and second by turning briefly to their impact on the present state of the world.

For me and for my friends, 1989 was the year of the greatest blessing. Although we predicted earlier (with my husband Ferenc Fehér) the neces-

sity of the collapse of the Soviet-style regimes, we never hoped that this would happen in our lifetime. And when it finally did, we were busy to disclose the ideas of 1989, the great expectations we entertained about the future of the new, democratic Central European nations. Nevertheless, we never shared the illusion of the end of history or of the so-called third way between capitalism and communism. We did protest against the arguably condescending remark by Timothy Garton Ash, according to whom Central European states were finally joining the band of “normal” countries. We believed that, after these countries’ historical experiences, they would perform above the so-called normal. After twenty years I have to admit that the prediction of Timothy Garton Ash was rather optimistic.

And still, for me and for all the people of my generation who treasure freedom, 1989 has lived up to its promise. Central European societies live under democratic constitutions now; their citizens enjoy civil rights and have the possibility to participate in decision-making processes. These states also joined the European Union and state borders slowly vanished.

Yet a great part of the generation which had grown up before 1989 lost its enthusiasm. In Hungary, and to a lesser degree in other Central European former communist countries, a great part of the population felt betrayed. They expected from the system a change at the level reminiscent of Austrian standards of living, for they believed that democracy went hand in hand with high living standards. Many people became even poorer than they had been before, while others, in far lesser numbers, became extremely wealthy, at least by Central European standards. The value of freedom could not be turned into cash. The biblical scenario has once again been repeated: after having been liberated from the slavery of Egypt, wandering in the desert, people longed for the fleshpots of Egypt or begun to worship the golden calf.

For the East Central European generation who has never known slavery, the kind of freedoms they enjoyed are considered natural, and this is why they do not regard those freedoms as something especially valuable. Euro-skepticism also gained some momentum. True, in this respect, the so-called new democracies became normal, since the European Union is, generally, very bad at integration. Not just bad at integrating immigrants, but also bad at integrating youth in general. The depreciation of democratic institutions and civic freedoms by a great part of the young generation is expressed in two dif-

ferent ways. The majority adopted political indifference, as the mode of “who cares?” is directly appended to taking postcommunist liberties for granted. A small minority though, as has become more and more apparent in the past five years, began indulging in acts of violence, breaking shop windows, burning cars. Wanton rebellion grew into a European-wide mode of irrational politics.

But let me now turn back to 1989 not as a lived experience, but as a historic event. One could study this year as the model case of the decomposition or self-destruction of totalitarian societies. Communist regimes, unlike Nazi Germany, were not destroyed in war. Moreover, this happened without the need for revolutionary violence (as was the case during the Hungarian revolution of 1956). All communist countries collapsed one after the other, at an accelerated speed. The so-called domino theory proved correct not only inside these countries, but also within the entire Soviet bloc. The anti-totalitarian revolution swept fast through all the communist-dominated countries until it hit the heart of the empire, the Soviet Union itself.

In order to give an account of the self-destruction of these totalitarian regimes, I must first provide my own interpretation of the nature of these systems. In order to make sense of my description of a fast sweeping revolution, I also need to give an account of my concept of revolution. A regime is totalitarian if it outlaws pluralism. Only modern states can be totalitarian, for pluralism can be outlawed only if it exists. Totalitarianism is not just dictatorship, neither is it just tyranny. It is a specific modern kind of dictatorship or tyranny.

What does it mean to outlaw pluralism? The building cell of a totalitarian state or society is the “party of a new type”, which has been invented by Lenin in the well-known discussion about the party statute of the Bolshevik faction. The central power within the party (being a group or a single person) decides absolutely about right and wrong, permitted and not permitted, including not just action, but also views and opinions. Actions, views or opinions which deviate from the ones commanded by the center will meet sanctions, will result in repercussions, and exclusion from the party. This kind of party is shaped for the seizure of state power.

Whenever state power is seized, the whole state will be modeled upon the model of the totalitarian party. The party functions as the dominating power of the state—the mode of asserting party sover-

eignty. Party sovereignty means that the party is the source of all powers. Again, the central institution of the party decides about right and wrong, in all actions, views, opinions. All alternative actions, views and opinions are outlawed; they are illegal, sanctioned, punished this time by imprisonment, deportation, or death. Just as the totalitarian party totalizes the state, so the blueprint of the totalitarian society totalizes the country as a whole. The party decides which social institutions are permitted or not permitted, which kind of books should be published, censored, or banned, what kind of economic order, education and so on is obligatory, tolerated or not tolerated. It depends on the historical period, international relations and other factors, whether nothing will be tolerated or several things will still be allowed.

It is basically an ideology which serves as the nodal point for illegality. In Nazi Germany, Jews were outlawed as well as everyone who helped them; the Soviet Union outlawed kulaks and private property altogether; and in contemporary China it is illegal to have more than one child. What is not outlawed is tolerated.

All Eastern European societies had been totalized by the occupying army of the Soviet Union, while their early postwar politics were dominated by local communist parties. The Soviet Union, which totalized the Eastern European states, had already been totalized by a dictator, Stalin, and later by the collective dictator represented by the Politburo. For the Eastern European communist parties, the Soviet party played the role of the center since the center kept dominating. The crises of 1956 and 1968 showed that it was an illusion that these regimes could be put down or reformed from the periphery. The center had to become unsure about its right to rule, or, alternatively, its interest to rule, prior to a successful strike against it from the peripheries. The Soviet regime was at least partially legitimized in Russia, and occasionally also in broader regions of the Soviet Union, for it was supported by nationalism and a traditional inclination towards autocracy. In contrast, in Central Eastern Europe, the same type of regime remained alien from the national tradition of each and every occupied country, and had been superimposed on them by a peace treaty. Four experiences, in Berlin, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw, showed that the periphery would never deviate from the center unless this was in the interest of the center itself. But when is the interest of the center to liberate its periphery and weaken its own power and influence?

The most blessed political moments are always explained by historians in one or the other causal nexus. I think, however, that although such efforts are not in vain, they do not fully clarify the picture of such extraordinary events. Briefly, there were no sufficient reasons for the Soviet regime to let its own periphery go more than twenty years ago. As so many great events in history, this also happened by accident. Such a blessed accident could have happened earlier. Immediately after the victory against Nazism in the Second World War, still in alliance with the great Western democracies, totalitarian rule could have already been abandoned. After having missed this favorable occasion, the next occasion presented itself after Stalin's death and especially during the times of the Hungarian Revolution. We know, in fact, that Khrushchev hesitated before deciding in favor of the intervention. Had he decided otherwise, the whole Soviet empire could have gone down as a result, although (taken into account other contingencies) this might have also been avoided. The year 1989 was the third occasion. Yet, that Gorbachev was elected as Soviet party leader was an accident. And even he did not act the way he did on the grounds of an earlier plan or decision.

After the Soviet model, each East European party was ruled by its own center without any legitimacy. It was obvious to the leadership itself that without the backing of the Soviet Union they would lose their power immediately. This was also true for the communist parties which kept an apparent distance from the Soviet leadership and boasted their independence, like in Romania. Nicolae Ceaușescu lost his power in a low-scale popular revolt only a few months later than the party leaders who were entirely dependent on the Soviets, like the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In Hungary, the interest of the ruling communist party was divided, given that the stratum of economic managers would have preferred an opening to capitalism. What has succeeded for the time being in China – to include private property and a capitalist market among the “permitted” segments of a totalitarian regime – was, however, not possible in Eastern Europe. National independence had to be restored and this could happen only by a legitimate leadership, elected by the population among competing parties in a general election. Liberties had to be constituted.

Very soon afterwards the domino effect set in. Once the empire had fallen apart, the Soviet communist regime could have survived

only by re-instituting terror. This was the traditional answer to the loosening of the grip of the Party, and could have succeeded. The condition for success was a resolute party leadership. But, as it turned out, the party leadership was not resolute this time. Gorbachev, on his part, was not ready to return to a state of terror and also entertained the illusion that the system could be reformed. This turned out to be an illusion, not least because the legitimacy of the regime was at its lowest by the beginning of the nineties.

The model of the collapse of a totalitarian regime can be thus described as follows. It presupposes the massive loss of legitimacy within a country or within an empire on the periphery, and a loss of interest and resoluteness to maintain the regime in the center. In temporal terms, the first can precede the second, but without a loosening of the grip in the center, no loss of legitimacy or even liberation movements or revolutions on the periphery can succeed in toppling the dominating center. And this is, in my mind, relevant also in the case of contemporary totalitarian regimes. Twenty years ago, the Soviet system collapsed in an accelerated speed in all dominated countries. The domino effect started with the fall of the Berlin Wall and ended with Yeltsin on the barricade.

Liberation is the condition of freedom, yet in itself it is not freedom. Eastern European countries were liberated in late 1944 and early 1945 from the Nazi occupation, but they became free only for a few months or years before being subjected, this time, to Soviet domination. Liberation needs to be followed, as Hannah Arendt convincingly argued, by the constitution of liberties. Simultaneously, the dismantling down of the institutions and working mechanisms of totalitarian regimes was on the top of the agenda. First order of business was the elimination of communist secret services and the institutional networks supporting them. From this eventually followed the demand to make the names of the spies and informers public and, in addition, to prevent them from taking positions in any democratic institutions. The latter move has not been carried through everywhere. For example, in Hungary it has been kept on the agenda for more than twenty years. However, in the plebiscite of 1990, the overwhelming majority decided to prohibit the organization of party cells in workplaces.

It was in fact easy to establish democratic institutions and, at least formally, democratic practices. A multiparty system, general elec-

tions, secret ballot, free trade unions, and constitutional courts were – as institutions of freedom – soon in place. They were different in the various former satellite countries of the Soviet empire. Here, I am not taking into account the states which were established after the decomposition of the Soviet Union, since some of them institutionalized autocracy instead of democracy, Russia included. I am also not considering the transformations in the DDR, since it has not remained an independent country.

Thus, what Arendt called the “constitution of liberty” has been accomplished. But more often than not, these institutions were not yet filled with a democratic spirit. This disappointed the expectations of the groups who wished a swift transition to democracy. Given that during the “long revolt against Yalta,” as we called it, from Berlin, through Budapest and Prague, to the Solidarity Movement, it was always the civil population that mobilized itself against the regime, showing solidarity and displaying civic courage—in other words, all the basic constituents of a democratic spirit—this expectation was more than justified. Since a democratic spirit mobilized people in times of danger and sacrifice, it was thought that it would surely be the mobilizing force of an already legal, existing democracy. This has not happened—why?

In the past twenty-two years, the scholarly literature has provided several answers to this query. First, the system change did not result from a revolution, not even from a liberation movement. True, there were samizdat publications and flying universities, but it was only in Poland that a kind of popular movement of resistance remained active from the early eighties onwards. Despite former acts of resistance and revolt, in 1989, Eastern European societies received democracy as a present offered without a contribution of their own.

Second, and I think this is the major reason, as long as the totalitarian dictatorship had to be resisted, everyone agreed in saying “no.” Only the shared “no” was of importance, nothing else mattered. But the very moment that communist domination was gone, the question of “yes” was put on the agenda. It turned out that people who shared a “no” did not have the same version of a “yes.” Everyone wanted communism to go, but as an alternative, many had in mind the establishment of regimes and ways of life quite different from democracy. The split of the Solidarity movement is the best case in point. Liberals and

fundamentalist Catholics, socialists and right wing nationalists were no more sailing in the same boat.

Third, after only a short time the spirit of democracy was historically defeated. This happened everywhere, but not to the same extent. In my mind, Hungary became the worst case, although by far not the only one. Among the former Soviet satellites only Czechoslovakia did, for a short time, have a democratic government. None of the other states ever did. True, Hungary can boast a splendid liberal episode at the end of the nineteenth century, but it remained only a brief episode. Almost all countries in Europe carried the weight and suffered the consequences of World War I, the original sin of the continent before 1945. Yet, at least from 1945 onwards, they could not only establish—although with constant relapses into kinds of quasi-Bonapartism—democracies, but were offered time and space for a democratic spirit to develop. The Eastern European satellite communist states, however, did not have forty-four years of democratic experience and contestation at their disposal. They were confronted with their own history in 1990, just as the West-European countries had been in 1945. That some of them were among the winners of World War II, whereas others were the losers, had been of zero significance during the times of Soviet occupation. Now, old wounds have been opened, old offences remembered. Between and within countries, old aversions have been kindled, and remedies claimed against all the real or seeming injustices put on the agenda.

Within the countries of this part of Europe, the Soviet regime was regarded—mostly rightly so—as an interruption of their national history. But from where to start over? From the times of the king? Ask the Romanians. From the Beneš era? Ask the Czechs. From the Hungarian crown, or from Tiso? Ask the Slovaks. From the rule of Admiral Horthy or from the Constituting Assembly of 1945? Ask the Hungarians. One can hardly reach back to a period in these countries' histories where their societies would not differ substantially from their realities in 1989. For, despite the terror and destruction of communism, decades have passed and Eastern European countries were modernized. Admittedly, it was a distorted modernization, but it was still a modernization.

And what about restitution? The communist regime robbed owners of their property. Should they get it back? Sometimes the same property changed hands three times. What about compensation? How

much? To whom? And what about historical crimes? To which period do we acknowledge continuity and responsibility? Hungarians were co-responsible with the Germans for sending their half million Jewish citizens to Auschwitz to perish. Have they tried to come to terms with this dirty moment of their past? And what about Poland? Do they feel responsible for having driven out millions of Germans from their homeland? And what should happen with the spies and the police informers of the communist regimes? Should they be put to trial? Or should they be blocked from entering state service? Or should their names be made publicly known? In Hungary, where in a successful plebiscite in 1990 the secret service as an institution was not only disbanded, but its deeds unmasked, there was no public access to the secret police archives for twenty years.

To further complicate the picture of postcommunism, the history of the twentieth century casts an even darker shadow over the interstate relationships of Eastern and Central European nations. History is like a sleeping beauty, although it is far from beautiful. The prince called democracy has kissed and awakened a troubled history after 44 long years of sleep. The enmities of the twenties and thirties have come back with a vengeance in the aftermath of communism's demise. Instead of concentrating on the difficult tasks of their present, some political parties, especially those on the right, have mobilized supporters with slogans of interwar nationalism. These slogans were successful in gaining support, even if the cause they put forth was entirely irrational. Look, for example, at two neighbor states, both members of the EU, Slovakia and Hungary. Hungarian nationalists insist on the establishment of a Hungarian university at the border, without adequate teaching staff. Slovakian nationalists insist that in Hungarian school books the names of cities should be in Slovakian. More than twenty years since 1989 the examples are countless. Whereas Frenchmen and Germans succeeded in forgetting their past enmities, postcommunist nations cling to the ghosts of their pasts. Germans and French did enumerate their grievances, all the wounds inflicted and suffered, and did so without end. But they ceased following such a futile path, showing that history's lessons can be learnt beyond mere retribution. Sometimes it is our duty to remember, sometimes it is our duty to forget. In this case, it is our duty to forget, because only forgetting liberates the spirit of democracy from the prison of the past.

Finally, after 1989, the political class which took over from the former ruling party had zero practice in democratic politics. Yet, successful politics presupposes politicians with certain skills, such as a sense for diplomacy and practice in negotiation, problem solving, and making decisions. Take, for instance, the example of medical students, who, without any experience, are put in charge of a difficult brain operation. The hope for success is very low. True, twenty years would allow for the amassing of some leadership experience. There were some countries where the learning process proved more successful than in others. The more politicians succeeded in forgetting history, the greater was their success. Furthermore, the population was also unfit for the practice of civic virtues and the ways of democratic conflict resolution. Under conditions of a population poorly handling the democratic process, politicians could hardly be expected to fare better. One could even say that, in this respect, things worsened in comparison to the times of the 1989 revolutions. Maybe two decades are not that long in historical terms, especially not in the case of countries without a democratic tradition. One could even cast a retrospective glance on Italy or France in 1965, twenty years into the postwar period, and make a similar remark.

One area in which the transformation since 1989 is markedly visible is the economic field. Communist totalitarianism had outlawed private property and limited the workings of the market. The dissolution of this type of regime was followed by privatization of most of the state-owned properties and by joining the world market (in some countries at a faster, in others at a slower pace). Just as practice in democratic norms was entirely lacking, so were the rules to conducting business. As it always happens at the moment of liberation of the market, capitalism appeared in its most savage form. Some people became extremely wealthy (in Central European terms) in one or two years, capitalizing on the position they had occupied in the former regime. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few individuals was very rapid, without any history of merit. The irrationally, ideologically established heavy industry collapsed, unskilled labor was no longer required, whole strata of the population were impoverished, and social tensions were on the rise. There were only very problematic ways in which to cope with these tensions. Either economic rationalization, as a consequence of which the hopeless population left the country the moment

it became possible, or, spending a huge amount of national wealth on redistribution (in Hungary it was 50 percent), which threatened the economy with total collapse – in the long run also those it wanted to protect. This is why a considerable part of the population, and not just the elder generations, are nostalgic for the fleshpots of Egypt (i.e. the artificial policies of total employment or the subsistence social security system under communism). They were used to paternalistic policies and now expected the state to solve all their problems, as well as social conflicts. Many times, this social dissatisfaction was misused via populist demagogy, religious hypocrisy, nationalism, racism, and else. The economic problems of postcommunist countries remain one of the constant sources of social and political unrest, a potential Achilles heel for the democracies still searching for a stable footing.

Let me return now to the beginning of the paper. The impact of the collapse of Soviet totalitarianism on the world and especially on Europe has obviously changed the balance of power in favor of democracies. For a short while, it seemed as if the world would be left with only two dominating powers: the United States, and then the slowly emerging and expanding European Union. But this scenario turned out to be illusory. The terrorist attacks from September 11, 2001 and their aftermath made this painfully obvious. Although threatening signs could have been detected much earlier, the collapse of the Soviet empire has not resulted in the end of totalitarianism. A new kind of totalitarianism has occupied the territory of the old. The world now faces a new kind of totalitarianism built around religious fundamentalism, replacing the secular religions of the past century. What did not change in the totalitarian scenario was the image of the enemy: liberalism, individual rights, liberties, democracy. The symbol of the enemy became the United States and Israel, and to a lesser degree the European democracies. The means to manifest and practice hatred became the exercise of terror. Democracies have learned how to deal with the old, Soviet-type totalitarianism, which, as a result, became less and less threatening. The same democracies have yet to learn how to deal with the new type of totalitarianism and terror.

In the meantime, after a fledgling democratic interlude, Russia has turned into an autocracy. In addition, anti-democratic movements of both right and left wing radicalism have begun to gain momentum again in several parts of the world. Simultaneously, however, the European

Union has significantly expanded, by now including almost all post-communist Eastern European countries. This move cemented democratic resolution and solidarity, and has shown its benefits. Yet, the European Union is based on mutual interest; not on the active participation of the population of its member countries. There are no citizens of Europe. This arrangement sufficed while everything seemed to go smoothly. Yet at the moment of its first trial, the economic crisis, European solidarity went to pieces and national interest got the upper hand.

In all probability, the economic crisis will not destroy the European Union, but it definitely revealed its vulnerability. This vulnerability is not temporal, for the sore spots were not healed at the time of the accession of the new members. Here, I mean first and foremost the conflicts between center and periphery. But the conflict between generations seems to me more dangerous, for it hits at the heart of most European countries and cultures. Europe showed to be rather non-proficient at integrating non-European members, and, even more so, its own youth. The new generations hardly acknowledge the burden of the past and the pains of the road to democracy. The old generations find themselves more and more in trouble with talking about the challenges they overcame in reaching stable and liberal societies. The dangers of old histories lurk in the shadows of a stalling civic, intergenerational dialogue. Disconcertedly, the extremes seem to ring a fresher tune in the ears of many of the young than the grey tunes of democracy.

Twenty years after 1989, democracy, freedom, and human rights do not matter much for the youth of Europe. Their participation or even interest in day-to-day politics is small; if they are interested at all, their most visible contribution to political life consists in burning cars, smashing shop windows and fighting the police. This is not true only about Budapest or Sofia. Just look at Athens, Paris, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, London, or Berlin. The rebellious youth of today is unlike the one of 1968. The latter, despite their rather muddled ideas, entertained hopes and developed political utopias for future implementation. They said also “yes” to something new, not just “no” to the establishment. One can go to much trouble and hardly find a similar development nowadays. Every democracy vests its greatest hope in the future generation. What can we hope for at the sight of this young European generation?

I do not blame them; rather, I blame us. I blame those who prematurely and triumphantly pronounced the advent of instant democracy in 1989. We were happily greeting our arrival in the democratic world without noticing that arrival for us meant departure for others. Those who departed then did not know the goal or the meaning of their life and actions. At a time of the decomposition of families as value providers, European youth was left without communities. They are hungry for goals and for camaraderie and they find none. American youth still fares better, for religious communities have remained value providers, and since they are many and divergent, young people can still choose the community which suits them best.

I have not told this story to discourage our generation or anyone involved in freedom, democracy and liberal values in the here and now. I only wanted to say the obvious. There is no earthly paradise. The triumph of 1989 remains a triumph even if it was soon followed by other, new trials and dangers. We do not occupy a privileged position in history. Our planet remains a dangerous place, as it has always been. But there is constantly something to do, to improve, and to preserve. It is the legacy of the present to preserve the hopes of 1989.

KAROL EDWARD SOŁTAN

*Moderate Modernity and the
Spirit of 1989*

What does it mean to see the world as a citizen, to see it in light of a civic ideal? What does it mean to see history in light of the civic ideal? In this essay, I will try to illustrate my answer to these questions. But the answer is, broadly speaking, this: It means to look at the world and its history in a new way, in which we see a world full of projects, some quite ancient, others recent. And we see them not in the way a spectator might see them, but as someone eager to take part in the great task of shared creation, and of developing ideas which support that task. We see a world in which outcomes are not distinguished by their probability, as a spectator might see it, but by their difficulty. And we see a world in which at least a significant number of constraints we face are not causal determinants, but impediments, and in which we can build instruments that help us to diminish, weaken and sometimes overcome those impediments.

Some of the largest of these projects are extended over time, beyond the lives of those who take part in their creation. What people do, then, is in some part determined by their participation in long-term projects. So what they do is not necessarily best explained by their ideas and intentions. What they were thinking at the time is important, but not determinative, for the history of the ongoing project. There is a distinction familiar to hermeneutics, and especially to the study of law, that is important here: the distinction between the intent of the author (e.g. the legislature) and the intent of the text (e.g. the statute). To understand the text or the statute as an ongoing project, rather than a finished one, we attempt to articulate the intent of the text or the statute, not necessarily the intent of its author. We do not look for the mental states and beliefs of the author. In the same way we do not

look for the intent of the author when we study the history of ongoing projects, except as clues they provide for the intent of the project itself.

The Spirit of 1989

In this essay, I outline what I call “the spirit of 1989,” and suggest that it is best understood as part of a larger moderate project of modernity. I propose that we look at the events of 1989 from the perspective of the citizen, and embed these events in a much larger project.

“The spirit of 1989” is a puzzling phrase. So let me begin by explaining both of its puzzling components: what do I mean by “spirit,” and what do I mean by “1989”? By “spirit” I mean that component of the culture of a time, a place, or a situation, which guides efforts to improve the world at that specific time and in that specific place. It is a key component of what we might call the potential for improvement contained in a situation. Of course, the spirit of most times and places is divided. Each time and place contains multiple projects, even multiple inclusive projects. However, very often, a few of these are dominant.

So, for example, we can see the political history of much of Europe between 1789 and 1848 as a struggle between the forces that defended the inherited principle of dynastic legitimacy and the forces of improvement (reform and revolution) supporting liberty and the sovereignty of nations. The latter were the primary carriers of the spirit of that period. After 1848 we see the emergence of an alternative revolutionary project, an internationalist socialist revolution. So the spirit of that period became more deeply divided, as well as weaker and more narrowly contained. Idealism and its projects of improvement were marginalized; there were noticeably fewer revolutions in Europe after 1848. Realism and a preoccupation with survival (and hence security and order) were more dominant. Bismarck and Louis Napoleon are the representative figures of this period. Until 1917, Marxist revolutionary parties and their international organization were a contained threat.

What happened in 1989 is of course a large and complex topic. What happens in any period of history is mostly a product of accident and error; most consequences are unintended. Beyond the randomness and chaos of accidents, beyond history’s unpredictability, what happens also depends in predictable ways on who has the guns and

the wealth, and on how they bring their resources to bear on human actions and events. But culture—including the ways people think and feel, what they are conscious of and what they believe in, which projects they take seriously and which they cannot even imagine—also has a powerful influence on what happens.

Years can serve as powerful symbols; they allow us to conveniently celebrate anniversaries. But years, even years as miraculous as 1989, are not adequate analytical categories. When celebrating the anniversary of 1968, it makes sense to discuss the (divided) spirit of the sixties.¹ When celebrating the anniversary of 1989, it also makes sense to discuss the spirit of the larger period, of which 1989 was a symbolic high point.

So the symbol “1989” is best understood not as referring to a year, but to a broader historical period for which the year itself was the high point. The period can be said to begin in 1985 when Gorbachev came to power, followed in 1986 by the “People Power Revolution” in the Philippines, the miraculous year of 1989 in Europe, the tragic year of 1989 in China, then the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the end of the Cold War global system, the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, and the Earth Summit in Rio, also in 1992. The end of the Cold War provoked a broader wave of democratization, whose other high point was the collapse of the *apartheid* regime in South Africa. It was a decade of profound political transformations, for which we can choose two symbolic endpoints: the democratic election of Nelson Mandela in 1994, or the creation of WTO in 1995, a triumph of constitutional democracy over the despotism of *apartheid*, or a crucial next step in the development of global institutional architecture. Still, the events of 1989 were the center point of this decade, and I will treat them as such.

The events of 1989 transformed the world in an unexpected way. If we consider the sheer scale and depth we could conclude that we were witnessing a revolution, and hence radical politics. But this did not match the contents of the changes. The latter – opposed as they were to human destructiveness and violence, taking seriously a commitment to impartiality and the common good (expressing it even in the language of the politics of truth), and insisting on the value of plu-

¹ See Karol Edward Sołtan, “The Divided Spirit of the Sixties” in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press 2010): 131–54.

ralism and diversity – suggested we were witnessing moderate politics in action, not radicalism.

The Moderate Project of Modernity

The period around 1989 can be seen as an important stage in the political and intellectual articulation of a project previously kept marginalized and misunderstood. Writing at the end of the period, and hence taking full advantage of Hegel's owl of Minerva, Gorbachev called it the project of a "new civilization."² Below, I will attempt to sketch this project, as a moderate form of the project of modern transformation, driven forward by a sequence of renaissances (and not revolutions). The collapse of communism was a victory for this global project, but it was an interrupted and very partial victory of a project that remains largely unarticulated. The events themselves, product of a partnership of reform from above (led by Gorbachev) and reform from below, can be perhaps best described as a faint and short renaissance.

Notoriously, we do not have an agreed-upon terminology to describe the events of 1989. The European Union has been aptly called "an unidentified political object."³ In a similar vein, 1989 seems to have been an "unidentified political event." Was it an anti-revolutionary revolution? A ref-olution (part reform, part revolution)? Some time ago, I proposed we develop a different category: "1989 as rebirth."⁴ In this essay I would like to revisit that suggestion. In the process, we might find even deeper affinities between the events of 1989 and the European Union. There is the obvious: the countries of East Central Europe aspired to join the EU, and many eventually did. There is the less obvious: both were novel phenomena, and hence they did not fit our existing categories. But is there a deeper affinity? I think

² Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Search for a New Beginning* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

³ Jacques Delors called it that. See Helen Drake, *Jacques Delors: Perspectives on a European Leader* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴ Karol Edward Sołtan, "1989 as Rebirth" in Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2000), 25–38.

so. Both 1989 and EU are best seen, I would argue, as products of the same distinctive style of politics and the same distinctive and ambitious political and civilizational project. This particular political style needs a name. I have called it elsewhere “militant moderation”⁵ and “vivid moderation,”⁶ but perhaps “civic moderation”⁷ would be better.

We can think of the modern transformation as a project in two quite different ways, generating two conceptions of modernity. The first conception, with which we are all familiar, posits a break with tradition at the center of modernity, a turning away from our inheritance. The French Revolution of 1789⁸ is the event that is crucial to these modern transformations. Modernity, or rather, capitalism, begins and ends with revolutions, say orthodox Marxists. But across a broad spectrum of views in political and social theory, modernity stands opposed to tradition. We enter modernity when we break with our inheritance.

The alternative view is also well grounded in history, but has been less thoroughly elaborated. The modern transformation, according to this view, is a product of a sequence of crises and *renaissances*, not revolutions. The Enlightenment, and the revolutions that followed, are an outlier, though not completely so. The politics of the American and French Revolutions certainly drew on ancient models, especially on those from republican Rome. But we also need to see the Enlightenment in its historical context. It is the combination of the rationalist Enlightenment and the Romantic Counter-Enlightenment that properly constitutes the “renaissance” of that stage of the modern transformation. Compared to previous renaissances, this one was perhaps more deeply divided. But it was not simply a *break* with the past; it was not simply a new beginning.

I suggest we tell the story of 1989 as part of the greater story of the development of human creative power, human civilization, and

⁵ Karol Edward Soltan, “Constitutional Patriotism and Militant Moderation,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* vol. 6 (2008): 96–116.

⁶ Karol Edward Soltan, “Vivid Moderation,” *European Journal of Political Theory* (forthcoming).

⁷ Hence the tentative title of the book manuscript toward which all these essays converge.

⁸ In some versions of the story the key break with tradition is the Reformation, so the key date is 1517.

the modern transformation of this civilization. I also suggest that the events of 1989 can inspire a novel way to tell this story, a way in which revolutions are sidelined and renaissances play a central role. I write this as part of a larger effort to take the idea of human beings as creators to the hilt.⁹

How can we do that? As our model and paradigm, we could elaborate the individual creative genius. Or, we could elaborate a distinctive type of event, a revolution that smashes all that has been inherited and creates *ex nihilo*, perhaps inspired by the Cartesian image of doubting everything and then rebuilding what you can believe in. Or, it could be inspired by the image of a social contract creating a society, or a state, or a codified account of justice *ex nihilo* (or at least from a state of nature) by a voluntary agreement. And often we see modernity in this way: a new age born on the ruins of tradition, and, rejecting tradition, creating a new world *ex nihilo*; a project of emancipation, including emancipation from the past.

But there is a more thorough and realistic way to take the idea of human being as creator to the hilt. The paradigmatic exemplar is human creation on the largest scale, a project which is inevitably shared and extended in time: a universal civilization understood as a project developing over the long term, which has many starting points and is composed as a mosaic of multiple projects; a project that is very much unfinished as we speak.

This is a project whose methodology, if we can call it that, is itself a project beginning in a world governed by fate and accident, but increasingly giving way to processes of human creation. There is, first, a transition from random trial and error to incremental creation. But we also see a deeper transition to a very different pattern of creation, and a different methodology, exemplified by the sequences of paradigms or research programs in the history of science,¹⁰ or in technology

⁹ Karol Edward Sołtan, "A Civic Science," *The Good Society* vol. 20 (2011): 102–18.

¹⁰ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3d edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)

driven economic development.¹¹ In all these spheres we observe a “cycle of creation”: crisis, renewal and then continuing slower development, leading to the next crisis. We can detect the same pattern, though less clearly, on the larger scale of cultural and institutional development. We can consider the modern transformation as itself taking the form of this cycle of creation, marked by a sequence of crises and renewals.

If we adopt this picture for the long-term modern transformation of the project of universal civilization, then modernity is not an Enlightenment project (nor, for that matter, can its roots be found in the Reformation or in Protestant ethics). The modern transformation, rather, is a process centered on a “cycle of creation,” making, using and exhausting new forms of creative social capital, each stage separated by periods of crisis followed by renewal. Perhaps the most dramatic moments of this process are the periods of renaissance, and within them, the moments of breakthrough in which a new project comes clearly into view.

To understand this project of modern transformation we need above all to see it as a sequence of renaissances, because, if this picture is correct, the task today is to build towards a possible breakthrough moment of the next renaissance; a renaissance that will reformulate the project of modernity after the Great Crisis of the twentieth century, in the same way that the Enlightenment reformulated it after the Great Crisis of the seventeenth, the Northern Italian Renaissance after the crisis of the fourteenth, and the twelfth-century renaissance after the crisis of the tenth.

This future breakthrough moment of the next renaissance is itself a project we need to create in stages. The story is complicated, but in the period since World War II we have lived through a sequence of creative periods, which in retrospect look like moments in which the movement toward a breakthrough of a new renaissance accelerated, became more visible, and articulate. These moments are roughly the period from the last years of World War II to the descent into the Cold War (1943–49), the period we call the Sixties (1962–72), the period that centers on 1989, and currently the period since 2008.

¹¹ Carlota Perez, *Technological Revolutions and Financial Capital* (Cheltenham, England: Elgar, 2003).

In an essay I wrote ten years ago, I argued that we should see 1989 as a rebirth.¹² But of course it would have been a very partial and incomplete rebirth. It is better to see the whole sequence of political and cultural awakenings since World War II as an effort to formulate, and to start, the project of the New Renaissance. So, 1989 was not a rebirth after all; it was a glimpse of a rebirth, a stage in the articulation and development of the next stage of the modern transformation, the next renaissance. Please remember, it is a *project* of the modern transformation through a sequence of renaissances. Thus when we talk of this emerging new renaissance, it is not a prediction; it is part of an effort to understand what needs to be done.

On the homepage of the Gorbachev Foundation we find the following statement by Gorbachev himself:

The XXI century will be a century either of total all embracing crisis or of moral spiritual healing that will reinvigorate humankind. It is my conviction that all of us—all reasonable political leaders, all spiritual and ideological movements, all faiths—must help in this transition to a triumph of humanism and justice, in making the XXI century a century of a new human renaissance.¹³

I propose that we take this statement seriously, and that the events of 1989 can best be understood as part of a very early movement toward such a renaissance. And I propose that this renaissance is only one in a sequence of renaissances, which constitute the steps in what is an ongoing project of modern transformation. This project of modern transformation should be much easier to embrace when we see it in its long-term development, when we can look beyond its more recent destructive and distorted phase initiated by the Enlightenment, and the violent revolutions it brought in its wake. If we see modern transformation as a product of a sequence of renaissances, we will not be inclined to repudiate the legacy of the Enlightenment, but instead we will see the modern project as far broader. In addition, we will see the Enlightenment as a kind of outlier: tolerant of human destructiveness

¹² Sołtan, “1989 as Rebirth” Antohi and Tismaneanu, *Between Past and Future*.

¹³ <http://www.gorby.ru/en/>

in its revolutionary form, unbalanced, and neglectful of the task of the restoration of our cultural and natural inheritances from the past.

Where Marxists see history as a sequence of revolutions, let us consider an alternative: at the heart of the modern transformation lies a sequence of renaissances. Thus, there is not one transition from tradition to modernity – the view that dominates the classics of social theory such as Weber and Durkheim – but instead a cycle of creation, a sequence of crises, renaissances, and periods of development and flourishing, which extended those renaissances. Revolutions play a role in this story, as does the project of human emancipation, but they do not play the central role. They are the perennial risk, the looming danger, the peculiarly modern form of the destructive potential contained in human creative power. During the Enlightenment, and since then, revolutions have been unusually strong. Even moderate forms of politics and constitutionalist politics have been formulated during this period in a way distinctly overshadowed by revolutions.

A universal civilization, as anticipated by Marxism, would be built on the ruins of the civilizations of the past. A universal civilization anticipated by those who think of modernity as an Enlightenment project would also be built on the ruins of all traditions and civilizations of the past. Not so if we think of the modern transformation as a sequence of renaissances. In this case, a universal civilization would be constructed out of a universal cultural rebirth: a rebirth of the West, but also a rebirth of Islam, a regeneration of India, and a renaissance of the Confucian influenced civilizations of East Asia. In an interesting series of publications, Adam Webb has outlined such a possible future. He sees it as part of the revolutionary potential of the contemporary situation, to be brought about by a coalition of global anti-modernists.¹⁴ It is better, I believe, to see it as part of a possible *alternative* to the revolutionary tradition, proposing not an anti-modern program, but rather an alternative modernity; not continuing the modernity that has been a carrier of revolutions, but rather a modernity that can be seen as centered on a sequence of renaissances.

¹⁴ Adam Webb, "The Calm before the Storm? Revolutionary Pressures and Global Governance," *International Political Science Review* vol. 27 (2006): 73–92 and *Beyond the Global Culture War* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

The Idea of a Renaissance

If modernity is born of renaissances and not revolutions, we need a more precise notion of what a renaissance is. The idea of a renaissance can have a variety of uses, and hence a variety of meanings. When capitalized, it refers to a specific period in European history, starting around the middle of the fifteenth century (but perhaps earlier, so as to incorporate Petrarch), and spreading outward from its epicenter in Florence, and in northern Italy more generally. But similar historical periods have occurred at other times and other places, notably in the first centuries of the second millennium in Europe and Song China, but arguably, too, all across the great Eurasian land mass.¹⁵

The importance of renaissances has been noticed by various theoretical historians. It is a useful category for a variety of otherwise diverse thinkers with intellectual roots in philosophy, history, sociology and social anthropology. Thus, to develop a more theoretical conception of a renaissance, it is helpful to delve, for instance, into the study of the rise and decline of civilizations as developed by Toynbee,¹⁶ the revival of civilizational analysis in contemporary sociology, especially in the works of Krejci,¹⁷ Wittrock¹⁸ and Arnason,¹⁹ as well as the recent book by social anthropologist Jack Goody.²⁰ Some thinkers describe the characteristic historical pattern of renaissances without using the concept. Carroll Quigley, for example, in his classic *The Evolution of Civilizations*,²¹ presents the basic historical facts underlying the idea of the modern trans-

¹⁵ Johann Arnason and Björn Wittrock, eds., *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁶ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. XII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (one volume edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

¹⁷ Jaroslav Krejci, *The Paths of Civilization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹⁸ Johann Arnason and Björn Wittrock, eds., *Eurasian Transformations*.

¹⁹ Johann Arnason, *Civilizations in Dispute* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

²⁰ Jack Goody, *Renaissances: The One or the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²¹ Carroll Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979).

formation as a product of a cycle of creation, featuring a sequence of renaissances, but does not elaborate the idea of the renaissance as such.

A renaissance can occur in narrow as well as broad spheres. We can have renaissances of a particular philosophical tradition, a style of art, or a religion. But we can also have broader cultural and institutional renaissances, and it is these that are the featured items of theoretical history on the larger scale. For Toynbee, a renaissance is “[t]he evocation of a dead culture or of an obsolete phase of a surviving culture by the living representatives of a civilization that is still a going concern.”²² They are evocations of a ghost, Toynbee writes, without much sympathy. The analyses by others are more sympathetic towards renaissances, or at least maintain a more neutral posture. The kind of renaissances we admire are not simply efforts to return to the past, or to revive it like a ghost. They are better seen as efforts to restore continuity with some inheritance, while simultaneously giving it a new creative power. Thus Jack Goody, criticizing Toynbee, writes: “Toynbee, with his persistent metaphor of the *revenant*, does not fully appreciate the theoretical importance of a new birth, an efflorescence, which is intrinsic to the idea of a renaissance.”²³ I am not sure whether this aspect is intrinsic to the idea of a renaissance, but it does make the idea more attractive. And clearly, if we are to think of the project of modern transformation as a sequence of renaissances, it is this more complex notion of a renaissance that must be invoked.

Let me suggest that we develop a conception of a renaissance as a process that plays a roughly analogous role in the moderate project as that of a revolution in the radical project. Both are moments of deep transformation, beginnings of new stages of development. Revolutions involve a break with the past; renaissances restore continuity with the past. In this way, the moderate project of the renaissance reflects the moderates’ hostility toward destruction: it reverses destruction. It also reverses exhaustion: a new stage in the development of a project is reached, an exhausted project is reformulated and given new creative power. The moderate project of the renaissance is plural and complex: it involves multiple initiatives and multiple sub-projects. It exhibits that ancient ideal of both art and politics: unity in diversity.

²² Toynbee, *A Study of History* (one volume edition), 456.

²³ Goody, *Renaissances: The One or the Many*, 8–9.

Actual renaissances only imperfectly and partially reflect this ideal. If a renaissance is a project, it is something to work on; it is an attempt to achieve something. Past renaissances may provide exemplars, but they too are imperfect. Some renaissances put more weight on the reversal of destruction, others on the reversal of exhaustion. But an attempt to return to the past, to return to an origin (a frequent attempt in many contexts), is not a renaissance but its caricature. And an attempt, in revolutionary style, to create a new reality on the ruins of what we have inherited is also only a caricature of a renaissance, even when it produces an “efflorescence.”

The ideal type of rebirth, or renaissance, has two dimensions. First, rebirths reverse destruction. They restore some form of continuity with the past. Second, they bring back to life human creative agency. They are distinguished by the level and form of the activity they involve: there is an unusually high level of polycentric and incremental reform and creation. They are periods permeated by social energy and passion. They have their “efflorescence,” as Goody would insist.²⁴

1989: Partnership of Reform from Above and Reform from Below

The events of 1989 and the collapse of communism in Europe can be understood in a civic way as largely working out a project of an anti-revolutionary rebirth, driven by a partnership of reform from above and reform from below. The collapse of communism involved a number of examples of explicit round table agreements; the Hungarian and Polish cases being most prominent. But the entire process can be best seen as a product of a more tacit partnership of reform from above, initiated by Gorbachev in the “Headquarters” of the Soviet Bloc, and reform from below, initiated in the various Provinces, especially Poland and Hungary. Recently, Kotkin²⁵ has criticized the view of these events as products of civil society and of a reform from below. Fair enough: the anti-communist opposition could not have achieved much on its own.

²⁴ Ibid., 8–9.

²⁵ Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society*.

The outcome was a product of partnership, and the events are best seen not when looking at individual countries, but at the entire region. Reform from above had to be centered in Moscow. But the efforts to change communism from below were not evenly distributed across the Empire. The central point of the opposition was in Poland. There, the opposition had a long history and a society-wide organization beyond simple “civil society,” multiple civic groups and multiple civic initiatives constituting a polycentric system. In Poland, there were multiple civic projects, but there was also Solidarity, a more unified organization arguably representing society as a whole, a self-limiting organized social movement in the guise of a trade union. It was the main political arm of the reform from below.

The basic principles guiding this partnership of change from above and change from below can best be reconstructed by looking simultaneously at the political thought of Gorbachev (especially after he lost power in 1992 and ceased to be preoccupied with the short term), and the political thought of the anti-communist opposition (especially before it took power in 1989 and became preoccupied with the short term). Many have been satisfied with calling these principles liberal or democratic. But that is too vague, and it misses the novelty of the project, i.e. the degree to which these principles can point to a new stage in the modern transformation.

Reform from Above: Gorbachev

To understand the project of reform from above, it seems best to consider the political thinking of Gorbachev, who was without question its central figure. We need to trace his path. It begins with a return to his political roots. His first political reform programs are based on a close reading of Lenin. It is generally agreed, however, that he started his work of reform without a clear program, except the firm conviction that “we can no longer live like this,” as well as a strong distaste for a politics based on force.²⁶ But to reconstruct the project at the heart of

²⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev and Zdeněk Mlynář, *Conversations with Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 128.

“1989,” it is better to consider in more detail not Gorbachev’s starting point, but his destination at the end of our period.

Gorbachev did not have a program to begin with, but he did so by the time he was out of power. Towards the end Gorbachev had become, we can safely say, a humanist socialist. To say only that, however, would miss a great deal of the most significant detail. When we look closer, we see a more interesting set of commitments, seemingly an ideological hybrid, a conservative-liberal-socialism with a central pre-occupation: the fight against human destructiveness, its influence and its consequences.

Gorbachev has done and written a great deal since he lost power in the early 1990s. Amongst his writings, there are three sources I find most enlightening as regards to his political evolution. One source relates his conversations with his old friend from their student days (and a leader in 1968 of the reforms in Czechoslovakia), Zdeněk Mlynář. These were published in Czechoslovakia in 1995.²⁷ The second is his programmatic essay “The Search for a New Beginning,” published in English in 1995.²⁸ The third source is his significant involvement in the development of the “Earth Charter.” The Charter is a declaration of global principles, values and policy commitments with a strong environmentalist angle, which emerged from a broad consultative process across the global civic society. This project was launched jointly by Gorbachev and Maurice Strong (Secretary General of the Rio Earth Summit) in 1994, in response to the perceived failure of the Earth Summit of 1992. At the heart of the Earth Charter is the principle of “Universal Responsibility,” stated in the Preamble: “...we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community, as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world...”²⁹

What we see in Gorbachev’s political thinking when we consult these sources is a continuing verbal commitment to socialism, which now stands for no more than a commitment to widely shared ideals. In the discussions with Mlynář, it is his old friend who emphasizes the

²⁷ Gorbachev and Mlynář, *Conversations with Gorbachev*.

²⁸ Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Search for a New Beginning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

²⁹ <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html>

distinctively socialist themes of opposition to capitalism, organizing the working class and so on. Gorbachev seems uncomfortable with these ideas. He sees them as ideological, and he wants nothing to do with ideology.

Instead, he wants a “value based conception of socialism,”³⁰ with freedom, equality, justice and solidarity as central values. “The socialist idea,” he writes, “could become global humanism.” In fact, global humanism seems to be Gorbachev’s project. And the details have a distinctly moderate flavor. He is opposed to all extremism, ideology and imbalance: “Genuinely historical ways of solving problems on the level of entire civilizations generally transcend the framework of ideologies.”³¹ He continues restating in strong language a perennial theme of moderates through the ages: “one-sidedness has shown itself to be a chief cause of crisis and failure.”³² The mixture of themes from liberal, socialist and conservative traditions is striking. The conservative-liberal socialism that Kołakowski once imagined and that seemed to be the program of Solidarity in its glory days now is embraced by Gorbachev. In “The Search for a New Beginning,” he writes in words that echo Burke: “Each generation inherits from its predecessors the material and spiritual wealth of civilization. And each generation is responsible for preserving this inheritance and developing it for the succeeding generations.”³³ The spirit of Lenin has been left far behind.

Gorbachev’s main preoccupation is one that is central to the moderate tradition: a preoccupation with the need to control and diminish the influence of human destructive power. In the earlier years, when he still ruled a nuclear-armed super power, Gorbachev was pre-occupied with reducing the prospect of nuclear war. Nuclear weapons made it imperative to end the cold war, and not to use force as communism and the Soviet Union were collapsing. In the 1990s Gorbachev shifted to a preoccupation with the environmental crisis, the other main threat due to human destructiveness, and associated himself with the development of the Earth Charter.

³⁰ Gorbachev and Mlynář, *Conversations with Gorbachev*, 155.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

³² *Ibid.*, 160.

³³ Gorbachev, *The Search for a New Beginning*.

Perhaps the only thing that remains of his old Leninist commitment is the idea that humanity is entering a new stage, and ought to do so. This message is clear in both the title (“The Search for a New Beginning: Developing a New Civilization”) and the content of his 1995 programmatic essay. “We are on the threshold of a new era,” he writes, “the present civilization has exhausted itself.”³⁴ But it is not capitalism he is talking about, but rather, a civilization based on the imperatives of industrialism, uncontrolled exploitation of human and natural resources, social and national disintegration, and suppression of human liberties.³⁵ His key categories are civilization, the preservation and development of civilization, and the moral commitments necessary for this task. “The roots of the current crisis of civilization lie within humanity itself... our intellectual and moral development is lagging behind... Only by renouncing selfishness and attempts to outsmart one another to gain an advantage at the expense of others can we hope to ensure the survival of humankind.”³⁶ It is hard not to hear in these words echoes of the old Marxist dreams of a future society where no incentives will be necessary, because selfishness will be overcome. But the dream, in moderate form, is hardly distinctive to Marxists and socialists.

Gorbachev’s analysis brings to mind the language and arguments of Arnold Toynbee, calling for a new civilization. Toynbee is a bit of a forgotten man today, but in the 1950s he was celebrated by *Time Magazine* in a cover story article as the free world’s intellectual answer to Marx. Toynbee belongs to a larger group of intellectuals much of whose work was created in response to the great destructiveness of the 1930 and 40s. They responded neither with despair nor radicalism, but, rather, with big picture analyses of the development of civilizations and an articulation of what we might call a project of universal complex civilization. Toynbee was the great historian among them. He chose civilizations as his unit of analysis, because they are the largest (as well as most complex) cultural units. He saw them, at least in his later writings, as *projects*. Here is how W. Warren Wagar opens his account of this group of thinkers: “Arnold Toynbee credits ‘all civilizations so far known’ with the ambition, conscious or unconscious,

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 2.

³⁶ Ibid., 15.

of establishing a world order 'in which the whole of mankind will be able to live together in harmony, as members of a single all-inclusive family.'³⁷ None has fully succeeded, but each has tried.'³⁸

In this group of intellectuals, these "prophets of world civilization" as Wagar called them, we can also include Karl Jaspers,³⁹ whose work on the axial age and axial civilization was a succinct return to philosophy of history. The obscure work of Teilhard de Chardin⁴⁰, mixing evolutionary biology and theology, also belongs to this group, as does the sociology of Pitirim Sorokin⁴¹. As Gorbachev presents his ideas on the need for a new universal civilization and a global humanism, one can hear echoes of the ideas of this neglected group of thinkers. In the 1940s and 50s, they began to articulate a project of a new and universal human civilization. When the Cold War descended, their global dreams were marginalized and forgotten. Their fundamentally moderate spirit and their globalism did not fit well into the wild but politically constrained 60s. But after the end of the Cold War, it may be time to return with new seriousness to these formulations of a global project.

Reform From Below: Civic Society

The inspiration of the groups pressing for reform of communism from below was certainly different. It was also quite varied. But we can reconstruct some features of a dominant project among these efforts to change communism from below, beyond the obvious desire for freedom and democracy. The anti-communist opposition had a distinctive civic style of politics, and an ideal of *civic* society.⁴² The concept

³⁷ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. XII, 279.

³⁸ W. Warren Wagar, *The City of Man* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 69.

³⁹ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1955).

⁴⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper, 2008).

⁴¹ Pitirim Sorokin, *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (Boston: Beacon, 1948).

⁴² Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Václav Havel, *Living in Truth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987); Marcin Król, *Liberalizm Strachu czy Liberalizm Odwagi* (Kraków: Znak, 1996); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1992).

of ‘citizenship’ usually refers to a form of membership in the state, and its associated set of rights. But citizenship can also be understood without reference to the state or the rights and duties associated with membership in the state. Citizens can be seen as co-creators of their worlds, and as loyal to those worlds in a distinctive civic way. The anti-communist opposition evolved the idea of civic society as an alternative to more state-centered strategies of reform. The idea of citizenship implicit in this opposition had little to do with the state. Instead, it concentrated on a form of loyalty to society more generally, or, as Havel put it, on a feeling of “*responsibility for the world*.”⁴³

A society of citizens is a society of people pursuing a variety of projects, improving in a variety of ways the world around them, without much direct concern for the state. They are, above all, *co-creators* of their world.⁴⁴ The civic attitude combines a willingness to sacrifice in defending the object of loyalty with a willingness to sacrifice in reforming and improving this object. The loyalty of a citizen, with its combination of efforts to defend and improve, can be contrasted with the loyalty of a *subject*, who defends but is unwilling to criticize.

The anti-communist opposition promoted two kinds of “social arts”: the art of separation⁴⁵ and the art of association.⁴⁶ Society needed to be separated from the state, and various aspects and elements of society needed to be kept separate from one another. The blended and homogenized “fish soup” of communism needed to be transformed into a vivid and *complex* aquarium. The construction of complex institutional ‘wholes’ requires the art of separation, so that the identity of the various parts can be maintained. But it also requires the art of integration, so that the parts can be made to work together. So the opposition worked to reconstruct the broken forms of horizontal social solidarity.

Like Gorbachev (by 1995), the anti-communist opposition opposed existing ideologies. It had a preference for ideological hybrids

⁴³ Václav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible* (New York: Fromm International, 1998).

⁴⁴ <http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/?pid=710>

⁴⁵ Michael Walzer, “Liberalism and the Art of Separation,” *Political Theory*, vol. 12 (1984): 315–30.

⁴⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Knopf, 1945).

and the political center. Civic politics balanced two concerns: security (protection, maintenance) and improvement (progress, reform). We might call it a form of progressive conservatism. But in Poland, at least, another term became popular, expressing the widespread skepticism about the extremes of the political spectrum and what passes for consistency in politics. Many in the anti-communist opposition signed on to Leszek Kołakowski's liberal socialist conservative manifesto⁴⁷. Their political ideology was liberal, but it was *hyphenated* liberal. It was a hybrid, unapologetic about its political syncretism. Thus, the events of 1989 were not a liberal revolution, in part because they were not a revolution (they were more moderate than revolutions), but also because they were more hyphenated and syncretic (and hence more inclined toward the ideological center).

The anti-communist opposition rejected the idea of large-scale social experiments, as did Gorbachev in his 1995 pronouncements. It preferred the incremental and well tested. It tended to accept some version of a Popperian style of critical rationalism, and the idea of an open society. The rebuilding of the aquarium was going to be a decentralized and incremental task, in which much room had to be allowed for trial and error.

The oppositionists were quite conscious of human imperfection in all its aspects. They had evidence of what can happen when one forgets human frailty. Their political thought was mindful both of human cognitive limits and the pervasive danger of destructiveness. They thought a great deal about how to prevent an anti-communist revolution. And, in a deeply moderate spirit, they were inclined toward self-limitation, both in the choice of means (non-violence) and ends. Thus they supported the rule of law as an ideal for the state and a Gandhian style self-limiting social movement as the opposition to the state.

They revived not only the idea of a civic (or civil) society, but also the ideal of an anti-political politics of truth. This politics of truth can take a variety of forms. For the critical intelligentsia and public intellectuals, it mostly means speaking truth to power. For the great non-violent and self-limiting social movements of the twentieth century

⁴⁷ Leszek Kołakowski, "How to Be a Conservative Liberal Socialist," *Encounter* vol. 51, no. 4 (1978): 46–47; Marek Leszkowski, "Główne Nurty Solidarności," *Kontakt* (Paris) vol. 1, no. 8 (1982): 7–10.

(Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Solidarity), it is best expressed in Gandhi's term "satyagraha," or truth force.⁴⁸ In the constitutionalist tradition (moderate to the core) it has taken the form of natural law,⁴⁹ with its claim, in slogan form, that truth can be the source of law (*veritas facit legem*). Modern natural law incorporated as its centerpiece a commitment to some form of a universal charter of rights. This commitment, too, was prominent in the fight against communism.

The Emergence of a New Renaissance? 1948, 1968, 1989, 2008

The dominant project of 1989, which I sketched above, is best understood as emerging in the longer term, especially through the periods of political and cultural awakening since World War II. It is best seen not as a project of 1989, but as a developing project of a new renaissance (as I will explain more fully in this section); the contemporary stage, I suggest, of the moderate form of the project of modern transformation (as I will explain in the sections that follow).

The civic project is ongoing, and to move it forward you need to have some understanding of its past. The deeper and longer term our understanding of the past, the more easily we can realistically imagine possible futures: we can see in history multiple ongoing projects and battles. Instead of defining and solving problems in an ad hoc way, we can look for such long-term ongoing projects, with whose goals and principles we can identify. We do not act as if we were the first generation in the world. We aim to continue what the previous generations have begun, and what future generations can build on. Some of these projects are local, but others are more ambitious and global.

These projects come into view during historical periods of enhanced idealism, which alternate with periods of realism. When realism dominates, politics and life are predominantly concerned with survival, security, and order; the world seems stable, and change difficult. By contrast, when idealism dominates, politics and life are pre-

⁴⁸ See e.g. Bikhu Parekh, *Gandhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ See A. P. d'Entrèves, *Natural Law* (London: Hutchinson, 1951).

dominantly concerned with improvements, reforms, and even, occasionally, revolutions. The world is full of opportunities for change, or at least appearances of such opportunities. Masses of people believe that an alternative world is possible. This seesaw between idealism and realism is visible in the period since World War II. During this time, we can count three completed idealistic periods and three periods of realistic retrenchment. And we appear to be in the middle of another awakening of idealism.

The first post-World War II idealistic breakthrough can be roughly dated from 1943 to 1950. It was the period of the great hope that accompanied the ending of the war. In a few places this hope was killed early, but elsewhere it survived for quite a while, before finally succumbing to the realist spirit of the Cold War. This was a period of great enthusiasm for building global institutions (UN, IMF and the World Bank), and even a global civilization. It saw the beginnings of the European construction in the founding of the Council of Europe and the Schuman Declaration, which, through a long sequence of incremental and moderate changes, led to the European Union.

The new post-war idealism was expressed in a commitment to universal human rights founded on the principle of inviolable human dignity. This period also saw the beginning of the process of decolonization (in India and Indonesia) that would dominate so much of the global politics that followed, culminating in the collapse of the Soviet empire. The immediate post-war period also saw the continuing expansion of the communist revolutionary idea, with a wave of triumphs of communist revolutions (e.g. in China). But domestic politics changed inside democracies too. New institutional inventions emerged, which would create a very different democratic world, including a new form of democratic state, featuring powerful constitutional courts, central banks, and other regulatory agencies, and a new type of self-limiting social movement pioneered by Gandhi.

The second period of awakened idealism we have come to call the Sixties, though it does not fit the calendar decade very precisely. The spirit of this period began to awaken before the opening of the decade, but became apparent in the early 1960s, with Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement in the US, the hopes aroused by the Kennedy presidency, the Vatican II Council of the Catholic Church, and the Port Huron Statement as the first articulation of a more

radical project of change. The period ends sometime after 1972, the year we can count as the date of birth of a newly prominent and powerful global environmental movement (with the UN Conference in Stockholm, and the publication of *Limits to Growth*,⁵⁰ and the discussions it provoked).

Between these early and late events of the Sixties, we saw the massive expansion and collapse of student rebellions (in Mexico, Poland, Western Europe, the U.S., and many other places), the development of multiple forms of counterculture, the events surrounding May 1968 in France (much more than a student rebellion), the effort to create a socialism with a human face in Czechoslovakia, and a cultural revolution in China. These were the more dramatic events. Others were often less dramatic, but with more significant long-term consequences. The great theme uniting the early and the late Sixties, or the moderate and radical Sixties, can be found in the beginning of the articulation of a project of civic creative agency and civic society.⁵¹ This project, in its moderate form, dominated the next period of enhanced idealism, 1985–94.

There is more continuity across these three periods of aroused idealism than one might think. The theme of human dignity and human rights is continuous: from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the German Constitution, through the Vatican II's emphasis on human dignity and the politics of civil rights, to the triumph of the idea of human rights in the 1980s, culminating in the Miracle of 1989. The theme of anti-colonialism is continuous: from India and Indonesia, through Vietnam, to the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989. The Gandhian theme is also continuous: from Gandhi's contribution to the independence of India, through Martin Luther King, to Poland's Solidarity. In some ways, the Sixties stand out: the theme of the development of global institutions (prominent in the 1940s and after 1989) is submerged in the 1960s, made unimaginable by the Cold War context. But another theme is more prominent in the 1960s than in the other two periods: when the dust settled, cultural transformation was more important than political transformation.

⁵⁰ Donella Meadows et al., *Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

⁵¹ See Soitan, "The Divided Spirit of the Sixties."

The year 2008 seems to mark another shift from realism to the next idealistic period in this sequence. We can expect, even hope for, some continuity with the previous periods. We can achieve more today if we self-consciously build on what has been attempted and achieved in the past. And we can achieve more if we set out more clearly what needs to be avoided. Hidden in the hopes of people across the globe today we are bound to find the legacy of what we might call the divided spirit of the Sixties, the moderate spirit personified by Martin Luther King, and the radical spirit of the rejection of all limits and authority. Thus we have special reason to articulate an ambitious and passionate project of moderate politics, to counter the radical temptation, and to strengthen the moderate cause.

The election of Obama, it seems to me, brought this form of the moderate project back onto the front lines of politics. How, in this larger context, should we see the election of President Obama? Let us begin with the most obvious. Every nation has its abiding sin. The abiding sin of the US is the legacy of slavery, and the racism that has been its byproduct. Many Americans greeted the election of a black man with tears in their eyes, daring to hope they were witnessing moral progress. But racism, in various forms, is the abiding sin of much of the world, and so people all around the world had good reason to have tears in their eyes. Perhaps it is possible after all to make the world better.

Obama's slogan, "Yes we can," was not a precise plan of action. It is a verbal expression of a civic awakening, an attitude of hope and a willingness to act. The Obama campaign might well have used instead a different slogan: "Another world is possible." This too is a verbal expression of a civic awakening, but of course it has already been used by that network of movements and organizations which has been fighting for a different form of globalization, loosely organized by the World Social Forum, and forming the beginnings of a global civic society.

A civic awakening, whether in the World Social Forum or in the Obama campaign, can always take a radical turn. In WSF this has been quite obvious. But in the Obama campaign it was the moderate potential that was most noticeable. Cass Sunstein, then an Obama campaign advisor, described him as a "minimalist visionary," a politician with a grand vision of the future, but also a commitment to incrementalism and the search for common ground. A minimalist visionary is an ambitious moderate.

In the year 2012, as I write, the American civic awakening of 2008 has been eclipsed by different awakenings in the form of Tea Party and Occupy protests. But above all it has been eclipsed by the great events in the Arab world and elsewhere (India, Spain, Russia, Chile, and many other countries). Everywhere, it seems, the aim is human dignity, and the rights that give form to this dignity. And everywhere, it seems, the political method can be traced back to Gandhi. We note the common chant of the Arab Awakening, "Peaceful, peaceful," and the pervasive reality of the self-restraint of these protests. Among the more immediate influences on these movements are the strategist of peaceful resistance, Gene Sharp, and the experience of the non-violent Serbian opposition, Otpor, that fought Milosevic. The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia followed the style of the other color revolutions, as well as Solidarity in Poland before that.

The awakening in Arab countries and around the world is not isolated in time or in space. It is part of the great continuing and developing movement of civic renewal across the Arab world and elsewhere. More broadly, we can see it as the next stage of the global movement toward a civic renewal or a renaissance of modern civilization, building on the work of previous awakenings, symbolized by the years 1948, 1968 and 1989.

The Project of a New Renaissance

At the heart of the project are two moral principles, which can be expressed simply, but which can also be developed into complex codes. The opening line of the German Constitution, enacted in 1949, formulates the first of these principles concisely: Human dignity is inviolable. When fully elaborated, this principle gives rise to the entire contemporary code of human rights. We have those rights by virtue of the principle of human dignity.

The second principle is as yet less fully codified, but it is (as I mentioned) at the core of the Earth Charter. It is the principle of universal human responsibility, which the Charter attempts to elaborate into a complex code of norms and programs of reform. It is humankind's fullest and most public articulation of that "feeling of responsibility for the world," which Václav Havel saw as the chief motivating

idea of opposition groups fighting communism in East Central Europe. Beyond this central moral commitment, we can identify a variety of ideas, political methods and ideals that are at the heart of this project of a new renaissance. The following four seem most important.

CIVIC SOCIETY

It seems that almost everybody now favors the strengthening of domestic civic society (usually misleadingly called ‘civil society’), as an important bulwark against the coercive state and an instrument for decentralized reform. We increasingly recognize the importance of a global civic society, with its interconnected world-wide network of non-governmental organizations fighting to protect human rights, to defend the environment, to limit corruption, and so on.⁵² The idea and ideal of civic society is a project continued on the global scale, with the World Social Forum as its global locus and the Earth Charter as perhaps its most inclusive initiative.

THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

Deep social transformation can be achieved peacefully and effectively through a partnership of reform from above and reform from below. This has often taken the form of a fully explicit model of transformation through round table agreements. But the phenomenon is more general. We should include cases where the partnership is tacit, as I suggested we do in our analysis of the collapse of communism. This form of governance is the favorite of enthusiasts of corporate social responsibility and of “new collaborative governance,” based on partnerships between those who govern and multiple groups of stakeholders.

COLOR REVOLUTIONS

When the likes of Ahmedinejad, Chavez and Lukashenka meet to discuss politics they have been known to complain about the threats they all face, now often called color revolutions, though they are not

⁵² Jessica Mathews, “Power Shift,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 76, no. 1 (1997): 50–66.

revolutions, and they often lack color. Chavez has been quoted as saying to Lukashenka: "There are many possibilities now for forming a strategic alliance to save the world from madness, wars, and color revolutions."⁵³

These color revolutions are non-violent forms of mass politics, carefully organized, and often quite agile tactically, fighting for human dignity and aiming to obtain basic human rights, or perhaps simple democracy with honest (that is free and fair) elections. The Philippines in 1986 and Poland in 1980 were examples of color revolutions before we knew them as such. But just like the idea of a civic society, this is now a global model, threatening dictators all over the world. And there are organizations, notably the International Center on Non-violent Conflict and Gene Sharp's Albert Einstein Institute, whose task is to elaborate this model and to teach whoever wants to be taught the accumulated lessons of how such revolutions can succeed. These lessons are many and diverse. They come from the entire political life of Gandhi, who perhaps has done more than anyone else to articulate this political method. They come also from the example of the American civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, and from the Solidarity period of 1980–81 in Poland. In the period 1985–95, this model was pervasive. It was present in the collapse of communism in Europe, including the response to the coup in Moscow in 1991. And we find it quickly repressed in 1989 in China, and in the 8888 Uprising in Burma (called this because it occurred on August 8, 1988). Since then there have been many: the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia in 2000, the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon and the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the Saffron Revolution in Burma in 2007, and the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009. And now we have the Arab Awakening.

⁵³ Peter Ackerman, "Skills or Conditions: Factors that Shape Success or Failure of Civil Resistance." Paper presented at the Conference on Civil Resistance and Power Politics, Oxford, March 2007, 4.

UNIVERSAL COMPLEX CIVILIZATION

The period 1985–94 can be legitimately seen as returning the global project to the center of politics. It was there before, notably in the 1940s. In our period (1985–94), the European construction made dramatic steps forward at Maastricht, and the global economic architecture begun in the 1940s was finally completed with the establishment of WTO (blocked in the 1940s).

Extrapolating from Gorbachev's sketchy discussions and from some of the analyses of the earlier "prophets of world civilization," we can go beyond the banal (by now) platitudes about global governance. Within contemporary politics we can see an effort, very much in the spirit of *moderation*, whose goal is a universal complex civilization subject to law. We can imagine its legal foundation (a global constitution) as a complex union (like the EU: less than a federation, more than a league) of republics, especially if we reformulate our notion of republic to abandon the current identification of republics and states. A moderate would wish to subject this union to two kinds of constraint. The first is the constraint of higher law: a principle of universal human rights (which current political practice, including legal practice, can already allow us to codify), and a principle of universal human responsibility (which is now just over the horizon of what counts as international law, but is beginning to be articulated in important documents emerging from the global civic society, such as the Earth Charter). The second is the constraint of democratic legitimacy, the global constitution's democratic credentials being provided perhaps by intermittent but dramatic direct actions (through referenda) of a universal humanity organized as a complex demos (and not a nation, or a people, with a unified will), so not subject to majority rule.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Karol Edward Sołtan, "Mature Democracy and Global Solidarity" in Anthony Langlois and Karol Edward Sołtan, eds., *Global Democracy and Its Difficulties* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2009).

Two Modern Projects of Creative Human Power

Let me now complete the picture. I suggested that the moderate project of 1989 is best understood as a stage in the development of the project of a new renaissance, part of a sequence of renaissances that constitute the moderate project of the modern transformation. Let us now look at this broader context.

As the modern age proceeds, we can identify two competing, increasingly well-articulated efforts to develop creative human power. One we might call Cartesian, or revolutionary or radical. The second, it would be best to call moderate. 1989 was a great triumph of the moderate alternative, and a new opportunity to articulate it more fully. Among those committed to the development of creative human power, the party of revolution was at least momentarily defeated. Revolution was no longer to be venerated as the fullest embodiment of creative human power. Yet revolutions easily assumed this role. They were (or rather they were imagined to be) the great moments when the supreme collective human creator, the nation, a people, or the universal class, rose to destroy all that came before, to create *ex nihilo* something entirely new, a *novus ordo saeculorum*. Surely, so it seemed here, creative human power reached its ultimate heights: a large-scale version of the individual genius creating something out of nothing in a moment of inspiration.

What is the alternative? I call it civic moderation, and in the remainder of this essay I will sketch some of its content. The image it draws of large-scale human creation is not simply an expanded version of the individual genius. It is a process in which many participate (it is polycentric, plural, diverse, decentralized) over long stretches of time, with each generation preserving and enhancing in a civic spirit what it has inherited from the past. And we can find this process within the same dramatic events, the same revolutions that so inspired the revolutionary tradition.

Hannah Arendt ends her great work *On Revolution*⁵⁵ with a paean to the “lost treasure of the revolutionary tradition,” a form of gov-

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963).

ernment deeply decentralized and federative, a republic of wards for Jefferson, of councils and of soviets in multiple revolutions. She cites⁵⁶ Odysse Barrot writing during the Paris Commune in 1871: “En tant que revolution politique... 1871 est reaction contre 1793, et un retour a 1789... Il a effacé du programme les mots ‘une et indivisible’... pour se rallier a l’idée federative, qui est par excellence l’idée liberale et republicaine.”⁵⁷ Despite the fact that the spontaneous pattern in almost all revolutions is the organization of citizens into councils, and the further organization of the councils into various forms of federation, this is not a revolutionary idea, and it is not done in an effort to destroy what came before and to create a new order for the ages. Arendt adds another revealing quote from one of the official pronouncements of the Paris Commune: “C’est cette idée communal poursuivi depuis le douzieme siècle, affirmée par la morale, le droit et la science qui vient de triompher le 18 mars 1871.”⁵⁸

The pattern of councils, organized spontaneously during revolutionary periods and quickly forming into federations, follows some very old traditions. It follows the communal ideal that the Paris Commune traces back to the twelfth century, and also, almost to the letter, the pattern of consociation outlined by Johannes Althusius, the great theorist of complex polity of the seventeenth century, inspired by the complex patterns of the Holy Roman Empire. Althusius is now often seen as the forgotten alternative to Hobbes. He is an inspiration to the builders of the European Union, and to the consociational model of democracy developed by Arend Lijphart.⁵⁹ In the world of contemporary politics, Switzerland perhaps comes closest to this model. And it does so largely because – since it is really hard for outsiders to impose on the Swiss – it has preserved more successfully than any other country continuity with the Holy Roman Empire. The Paris Commune, it seems, was trying to return to the politics before the Westphalian age of sovereign unified territorial states. It was trying

⁵⁶ Following Heinrich Koechlin, *Die Pariser Commune von 1871 im Bewusstsein ihrer Anhänger* (Basel: Don Quichotte Verlag, 1950), 224.

⁵⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 270.

⁵⁸ Arendt, 325, quoting Koechlin, *Die Pariser Commune*, 66.

⁵⁹ Arend Lijphart, *Thinking About Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

to be Switzerland, and in doing so it was revealed practicing the new medievalism⁶⁰ *avant la lettre*, tracing its model to the twelfth century.

The pattern Arendt discusses is a striking one for revolutionary moments. It is best seen not as the “lost treasure of the revolutionary tradition” but as the suppressed and marginalized (and hence underdeveloped, inarticulate and distorted) *alternative* to the revolutionary tradition, with deep roots in medieval Europe. It was an effort to restore continuity, another renaissance submerged in a revolutionary format. And, as we can conclude from the speed with which the revolutionary councils federate, this alternative does not consist of small-scale politics that we can model on the ancient polis. Athens is not the model (about Athens as a model it is best to take the perspective of the inhabitants of Melos). The political ideal for this semi-suppressed alternative seems to me quite different. It is to restore continuity with the medieval project of building a complex universal civilization. The model may be Switzerland, and today it can be the European Union. Neither, of course, is a perfect model, but both preserve some of the political flavor of the medieval project of a universal and complex civilization, both fragmented and unified, exemplifying what is (strangely perhaps) above all an ideal of beauty: unity in variety.

The Moderate Alternative

Let me sketch the main features of this suppressed, underdeveloped and distorted moderate alternative. It will emerge that it is not much like the more familiar and superficial forms of moderation. On a range of key issues, let me set out starkly (and hence too simply) the contrast between the Cartesian, revolutionary and radical view, and its moderate alternative.

⁶⁰ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). Stephen Kobrin, “Back to the Future: Neomedievalism and the Postmodern Digital World Economy,” *Journal of International Affairs* vol. 52 (1998): 361–86.

CREATION

The project of enhancing and improving creative human power is at the heart of modern transformation. But in reality, it is (at least) two competing projects. Both are efforts to strengthen, promote, and give better form to this creative power. As ways of looking at the world, they inevitably have much in common. Above all, both projects consider human beings as co-creators of the world in which we live. Both celebrate *homo faber*. But they do so differently.

Seen from the Cartesian perspective, human creation is best exemplified by the individual genius creating something entirely new *ex nihilo*, and in the process destroying what was before. In the centuries following Descartes, political practice and theory added what was imagined to be a large-scale equivalent: a collective agent smashing the inherited reality and creating a new one. Revolutions came to be the most awesome exemplifications of creative human power.

What is the alternative? It begins with the recognition that the largest and most complex forms of human creation are multi-authored (poly-centric) and extended over time. Both markets and civic society are notable processes of this kind of decentralized creation and creation extended over time. According to this moderate view, the miracle of creative human power is not exemplified best by the individual genius or by a collectivity creating a new order in an inspired moment. Instead, it is best exemplified in what we might call “shared creative capital,” a shared stock of institutions and ideas which create a flow of improvements in the world. We may call these “projects,” and many such projects allow multiple authors and creation over time.

We can trace—in a kind of imagined history—human capacity to create from its origins, in a Darwinian process of random variation and selective survival, through a blind incremental creation in which we simply attempt to build on what has been created by those who came before us, to a process of creation in two stages. First, we create creative capital; then we use this creative capital in our processes of creation until its creative capacity is exhausted. We then go through a crisis in which a new form of creative capital is created that builds on the earlier one, and renews our capacity to create. This pattern is familiar, of course, to anyone who has at least a passing familiarity with the history

of science. Scientific paradigms,⁶¹ research programs,⁶² or research traditions⁶³ are perhaps the clearest examples. But a similar pattern, with its characteristic logistic curve of development, can be found in the last 200 years of technology-driven economic growth.⁶⁴ In larger civilizational development this pattern is inevitably hidden in the usual fog of the battles and accidents of history. But we are able to discern it in the sequences of development, crisis and renewal within European civilization from the ninth century on, and at the largest scale also in the pattern of development, crisis and renewal of civilizations in general.

CREATION AND DESTRUCTION

No individual who wishes to promote creative human power can miss the destruction that accompanies creation. How can we respond to this fact, especially now that the threat of nuclear war and environmental exhaustion and collapse need to be taken seriously? Many in the past embraced destruction as making the creative act more emphatic: we know for sure the new age has arrived when the old one has been destroyed. The King is dead; the aristocrats, capitalists or kulaks have been slaughtered. Revolutions appear as the great creators and destroyers.

But not all who celebrate destruction have been revolutionaries. One of the most influential accounts of market capitalism, in the work of Schumpeter (drawing on Nietzsche), presents the central figure of capitalism, the entrepreneur, as the master of the process of creative *destruction*, which the market enables and supports.

Is there a moderate alternative to this embrace of destruction, other than to abandon the project of creative human power? Moderation certainly opposes the power and effects of destruction. Let me suggest that the strongest way to do so, that also injects the strongest motivation into the process of creation, is to understand destruc-

⁶¹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3d edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁶² Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978).

⁶³ Larry Laudan, *Progress and its Problems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

⁶⁴ Perez, *Technological Revolutions*.

tion as an enemy. And since destruction is so often unavoidable in creation, it is, we might say, a *necessary* enemy.

Moderate politics opposes violence and destruction; it treats human destructiveness as the enemy. But we now also understand, as increasingly we must, that human destructiveness takes more forms than those traditionally recognized. A moderate politics, opposed to destructiveness in an advanced industrial society, needs to recognize the destructiveness of human economic activity. A certain kind of environmental concern must become an integral element of our opposition to destructiveness. Thus, the contemporary moderate project will necessarily be also an environmentalist project: it sees traditional concerns with limiting wars (direct power of the gun) and limiting coercion (indirect power of the gun) and a certain form of environmentalism as part of the same task.

In its attitude toward destructiveness, moderation need not be purely defensive. If we think of ourselves as engaged in a struggle between creation and destruction, then we do not simply want to reduce the power of destruction; we also want to enhance creation and reform, principled ways of making the world and human lives better. You measure success in a similar way in which you measure success in a football game: not by one number (how well we thwarted destructiveness, or how many goals were scored against us), but by two (measuring also the extent to which we made the world better, i.e. how many goals we scored ourselves).

There is another way in which we can go on the offensive against destructiveness. We do not just defend against destructiveness and destruction; we attempt to *reverse* it. The most ambitious goal of the struggle against destruction and destructiveness is to reverse it, to destroy the effects of destruction. In the post-Enlightenment age of the nineteenth century (certainly with echoes into the twentieth), this often took the form of reactionary politics attempting to turn back the clock and return to the past. The environmental equivalent would be an effort to return to a pre-industrial civilization, or perhaps to a pre-civilizational form of society and culture, a new and improved savagery.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ In the words of Henry David Thoreau, revived by William Ophuls in *Requiem for Modern Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

If we are engaged in a battle between creation and destruction, this is not an attractive proposition: it undoes the destruction but also the improvements.

In this context, the idea of a renaissance, of renewal or restoration, is more attractive. It is not an attempt to go back into the past, but to restore greater continuity with the past. So when we restore an ecological system, or an urban neighborhood, or a whole city, we do not go back to the past. To put it differently: the aim is to create what might have developed (an ecosystem, a neighborhood, a city) if human destructiveness had not intervened so massively. We can choose the most attractive form of what might have developed.

Sustainable development is one that limits its destructiveness sufficiently so that it can be sustained in the long term. Restorative development goes further: it restores what has been destroyed. The idea of sustainable development relies mostly on limits; restorative development is a different project with many more opportunities to create and to invest.⁶⁶ Development in the service of renewal can itself take multiple directions. It can restore and renew what has been damaged and destroyed, whether by human destructiveness (war or industry) and by natural destructiveness (natural disasters). It can also strengthen and reinforce a natural capacity for renewal, as happens, for instance, when we rely on renewable resources.

POLITICS

The radical project uses the model and paradigm of the French Revolution, and it identifies the next stage of modernity with a further emancipation of humanity. The moderate project, by contrast—and this is quite clear in 1989—is positively hostile to revolutions. Its idea of a deep social transformation is quite different. Deep social transformation is needed because all forms of creative capital eventually exhaust their capacity to guide improvements in the world. If the project of creation is to continue, we need a shift to a new form of creative capital. This is a difficult task, and it will inevitably generate con-

⁶⁶ Storm Cunningham, *The Restoration Economy* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002).

siderable conflict. Even if the new project builds on the previous one, it must reformulate it in order to renew the exhausted creative potential of the old. The process must preserve and reformulate its inheritance. And to the extent that it is a political process, we have a model of how to diminish its potential for destructiveness (all periods of deep transition have an enhanced potential for destructiveness): the transition is guided (as so many times in the 1989 period) by a partnership of reform from above and reform from below.

The moderate project is not hostile toward emancipation in the way it is hostile to revolutions. But the idea that the highest aim of politics (and not just politics) is emancipation and more emancipation, freedom and more freedom, seems oddly unbalanced. Let me suggest a distinctly moderate alternative. The goal of politics is emancipation along with something else to complement it: a commitment which can discipline our process of creation. Without limits and purpose, creative human powers have nothing to work with. Thus, moderate politics is attracted to the republican tradition: we should be loyal to a *res publica*; we should defend it, preserve it and make it better. We need certain kinds of limits, especially those that enhance our capacity to act. And so, unlike the radicals, moderate politics also loves the rule of law.

But law, too, will be understood differently in a Cartesian spirit influenced by the eighteenth-century revolution, or in a moderate spirit. For the Cartesians, law is likely to be seen as the creation of a sovereign state, the command of the sovereign, in the classic formulation of legal positivism. Law has a single creator, whether individual or collective. For a moderate, this is a very partial and inadequate understanding of the law. We do better to think of it as emerging from human interaction, as Lon Fuller suggested.⁶⁷ It emerges from adjustments between different human projects. Therefore, it is best seen as a creation of multiple independent authors.

Constitutions also need to be rethought. According to the view we inherited from the eighteenth century, dramatically illustrated by the U.S. Constitution, constitutions are new creations of a sovereign people, a unified demos acting through unified institutions. An older conception, preserved most fully in the British tradition, seems more

⁶⁷ Lon Fuller, *The Principles of Social Order* (Durham, NC: Duke, 1981).

adequate, especially as constitutionalist principles are applied to more deeply divided settings, whether Iraq, Switzerland, the European Union, or the world as a whole. Constitutions involve a commitment to enhance the power of impartial principles and diminish the power of the means of destruction. They need not be new creations of a sovereign people, but they must constrain coercion by principle; and they must diminish the prospects of violence. They ought to be balanced constitutions supported by a complex demos. A global constitution is hard to imagine if we are looking for a new creation of sovereign demos. But it is slowly emerging over the horizon, if it is a balanced constitution, limited by principle and supported by the complex demos of universal humanity.

Radicals may have had their global project, with the *Internationale* as its hymn. The moderates have theirs, and it need not be found in Kant. The emerging global project of the moderates, let me suggest, centers on the creation of a universal complex civilization, supported by a global complex constitution, which is in many ways a restoration of continuity with the medieval European project combining universal commitments embodied in the Papacy, Holy Roman Empire, and a common European law (*ius commune*), with a great deal of cross-cutting complexity (kingdoms and duchies, cities and leagues of cities, complex hierarchies of feudal ties, law merchant and manorial law). The main inspiration comes more from contemporary “new medievalism” and from such old sources as Dante’s *De Monarchia* and Johannes Althusius, and less from Kant. This is not a project of sovereign reason, but of creative human power. It is not simply the largest political aspiration of the Enlightenment. It has ancient roots. Remember Toynbee’s suggestion: all civilizations are projects that aspire to universality.

HISTORY AND MODERNITY

In the familiar images of Marxism, history proceeds inevitably from stage to stage, with transitions marked by revolutions. This theory of history was meant to simultaneously reflect the patterns of the past and guide radical political actions that influence the future. What would a moderate alternative look like? It would be an account of the large patterns of history with a practical purpose, but a different practical

purpose. The moderates' project emerges from the past, and as such can be best understood as a continuation of the past.

History is full of small and large creative human projects, or (as I have called them) small and large forms of shared creative capital. These projects operate in a sea of accidents, coincidences and unanticipated consequences, and among battles for influence and advantage. History is unpredictable because human creativity is unpredictable, and because accidents plays such an important role in human events. But we do see patterns, and some of them are the characteristic patterns of creation using creative capital.

One of these creative projects we might call the modern project of creating a universal complex civilization. Calling it modern is not meant to distinguish it from medieval. On the contrary: to understand the project, and to imagine its possible futures, we need to trace it back to early medieval Europe. And calling it modern is not meant to distinguish it from traditional, as it would be according to mainstream views in social theory and sociology. Calling it modern is meant to distinguish it from earlier efforts to create a universal civilization, whose unifying ideals and ideas were provided by religion and philosophy. These earlier efforts produced the Chinese, Indian, Christian, and Islamic civilizations. They were part of what Jaspers called the axial age.⁶⁸

The modern attempt to create a universal civilization is not likely to be a repetition of the axial age. We will not, and should not, return to the past. But we can reformulate the modern project to restore continuity with the axial transformation, without forgetting that it is *modern science* that is at the heart of the extraordinary expansion of creative human powers that the modern transformation has given us. It is hard to imagine the project of the modern transformation, apart from ideas rooted in modern science.

Modern science emerges as *part* of the modern project in Europe; it does not emerge *before*. We need to trace modernity to an earlier period. In fact, the pattern of development, crisis, and renewal from which modern science eventually emerged began long before the various conventional starting points of the modern age. There is an argument to be made that we should start the story with the corona-

⁶⁸ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*.

tion of Charlemagne in 800 AD. I would suggest the following: to be able to imagine a moderate form of the future of the modern project, we need to understand its past in a distinct way, as a development in stages marked by growth, crisis and rebirth. Modernity is not a product of a break with the past – intellectual and political – as the radical tradition would have you believe. It is a project that emerges through the sequence involving crises and rebirths. And 800 AD can be seen as a first effort to restore continuity with the more ancient axial age form of the effort to build a complex universal civilization.

But this beginning of the pattern of crises followed by renewals is certainly murky. It becomes more clearly visible (at least to us today) as we move forward in time. There was plainly a civilizational crisis before Charlemagne (we used to enjoy calling it the Dark Ages). There were more crises and renewals to follow, among others (perhaps) the crisis of the tenth century. But few doubt the reality of the efforts to reform and renew that gained ground in the middle of eleventh century (culminating, among other things, in the Renaissance of the twelfth century). Then another crisis occurred in the fourteenth century, followed by the Renaissance we are all familiar with. And, finally, there were crises in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries.

Modernity was not born in the seventeenth century, and the great crisis of the twentieth was certainly not without precedent. Modernity is better seen as a project with a much longer history and a substantial experience of crises and rebirths. So when, after the current crisis, we attempt to articulate a project to guide a new period of renewal, we are not doing anything unprecedented. The project of modernity has already demonstrated its capacity for renewal; our hope is only that it has not lost this capacity, and that we can succeed in giving it new shape.

The notion that there will be, or ought to be, a next stage of modernity or capitalism emerged in the nineteenth century as a radical idea; an effort to continue and intensify the project of emancipation. But what has slowly emerged, since the Second World War, is a moderate alternative, becoming clearly visible in the politics of 1989. It is still not very well articulated; nor is it very self-conscious theoretically or historically. It involves a deeper discontinuity from our immediate past than the radical project, but also a restoration of continuity with previous stages of the modern transformation. It is not to be identified with industrial society, or with the project of the Enlightenment. It is

better seen as a transformation in a series of stages involving attempts to restore continuity with the ancient world. We can see each great ancient civilization as a product of an effort to build a universal civilization. We now aim to restore that project, and to give it a new form. We attempt to restore continuity with the twelfth-century Renaissance by re-establishing the project of a universal complex polity committed to principle, though not in a religion-based form, as in the medieval *Respublica Christiana*. Thus, the project can be seen as a new medievalism. And we also attempt to restore continuity with the fifteenth-century Renaissance, as we see, for example, in the current revival of republican traditions. Outside the West, we restore continuity with ancient civilizations (we renew them), to help produce a more complex, balanced and universal modernity.

SCIENCE

The twentieth-century crisis of the modern project seems to be deeper than the previous crises. It is true perhaps, as Marx believed about capitalism, that the crises of modernity grow worse over time. One contributing factor to the depth of the crisis is the growing destructive capacity of human civilization, driven by science, technology, and science-based technology. We now have the capacity to destroy ourselves. Thus the moderate critique of modernity—that it is unbalanced and destructive—gains in urgency. Enhancing creative human power may not be such a good idea after all. Perhaps it was better to remain hunters and gatherers.

There is also a less obvious way in which a science-based civilization may turn out to be problematic. Science is at the heart of the spectacular multiplication of creative human power so characteristic of modernity. But when we attempt to understand not the natural world but the humanly created world (in “the sciences of the spirit,” as the Germans put it, *Geisteswissenschaften*), the effect reverses. Science, in its attempt to predict and its search for causal laws, appears to undermine the project of creative human power. If what we do is fully determined by causal laws, we cannot really initiate any actions, let alone create anything.

The radical project emphasizes skepticism and demystification as the heart of the scientific spirit. It is the acid that dissolves received

dogmas, emancipating us from the doctrines our ancestors unthinkingly accepted. Science, then, above all serves to liberate us, and to subvert the beliefs that came before. But this does not seem the full story of the scientific spirit. Modern science emerged during the European Renaissance, and the period immediately following; not in a period of skepticism, but rather one of a distinctively new enthusiasm for the possibility of embracing reality. In painting we have extraordinary progress in realistic representation, and we see the same with Renaissance maps. In the same period we witness the invention of increasingly accurate measurement devices. And we should not forget that this is also an age of exploration and discovery. On all these fronts we see above all an enthusiastic new love of reality, and a confidence that our beliefs can be made to fit reality better, to obey it more faithfully. The chief characteristic of the project of modern science, I would argue, is its confident and enthusiastic *loyalty to reality*.

To choose our beliefs in a way loyal to reality requires that we ask reality questions and accept the answers we receive. We construct experiments and accept the results. But we can also choose our beliefs in what we might call a more civic way: they should obey reality, but they should also help us improve it. We build then theories that articulate attractive projects of reform, small and large. We articulate projects of creative human agency, including the most encompassing project of a universal complex civilization. We do not assume that such projects can be constructed *ex nihilo*. We search instead for signs of their emergence in history. Thus, for example, we can see the period we have identified symbolically with the year 1989 as a window which, combined with the other politically and culturally creative periods since World War II, can guide us in an attempt to articulate, and put in attractive form, a moderate but ambitious project for a new stage of modernity. This, it seems to me, is an example of what it means to see the world as a citizen.

KONRAD H. JARAUSCH

People Power?

Towards a Historical Explanation of

1989

The celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the overthrow of Communism have enshrined the fall of the Wall as the most important European event since the end of the Second World War. Even if there was less enthusiasm elsewhere, in Germany numerous eyewitness accounts, media specials, public exhibitions and official commemorations expressed joy over the collapse of the GDR and the return of national unity. Recalling her elation as a 35-year-old East German physicist, Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel called November 9th a triumph of the “struggle against unfreedom” which she marked by walking with Mikhail Gorbachev and Lech Wałęsa across the Bornholm bridge, the first border-crossing point to open.¹ Many participants felt an irrepressible urge to tell their own inspiring story of flight, protest or liberation, with commentators hailing the popular mobilization as a victory of democracy over dictatorship. While commemoration efforts such as the candlelight march of 200,000 people in Leipzig recaptured some of the emotional excitement, such memory events have added little to historical understanding.²

Analyzing the significance of 1989 is complicated by a fierce clash of memory politics over who deserves credit for its success. Leading the charge have been the former dissidents who have devel-

¹ “Angela Merckels Rückkehr in die Vergangenheit,” *Die Welt* (November 9, 2009).

² Geschichtsforum, “Erzählen Sie doch Ihre eigene Geschichte von 1989!” www.tagesspiegel.de/meinjahr89; Henrik Bispinck et al., eds., *Programm: Geschichtsforum 1989/2009. Europa zwischen Teilung und Aufbruch* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2009).

oped a heroic narrative of resistance that portrays their own courage as decisive.³ In contrast, embarrassed communists struggle to explain why their experiment failed, and can only point to some timely concessions in yielding power reluctantly.⁴ With greater confidence, political apologists claim that it was the superior statesmanship of Kohl and Genscher, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze or Bush and Baker rather than of Mitterrand and Thatcher which ended the Cold War.⁵ Even erstwhile critics of hasty transformation or of German unification like Oskar Lafontaine can take some satisfaction from the subsequent adjustment problems.⁶ Missing in these discussions are, however, the voices of the majority of the population who opposed merely reforming socialism and insisted on its complete overthrow. Only when analytical perspectives free themselves from such partisanship will more convincing explanations evolve.

Interpretations of this caesura are also hampered by the contradictory explanations of the many volumes, written by participants and historians, on the dramatic events of 1989. Journalists like Michael Meyer have painted dramatic pictures of the fall of the Wall and scholars like Stephen Kotkin have provided bold, but somewhat misleading interpretations.⁷ Due to some leaks from the British Foreign Office on Margaret Thatcher's opposition and the disclosure of infor-

³ See the open air exhibition at the Berlin Alexanderplatz and Friedrich Havemann Gesellschaft, "Friedliche Revolution 1989/90," <http://www.revolution1989.de/>

⁴ For instance, Egon Krenz, *Wenn Mauern fallen. Die friedliche Revolution. Vorgeschichte, Ablauf, Auswirkungen* (Vienna: Neff, 1990); and Hans Modrow, *Aufbruch und Ende* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur, 1991).

⁵ Werner Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik für die deutsche Einheit. Die Entscheidungsjahre 1989/90*; Dieter Grosser, *Das Wagnis der Währungs-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion*; Wolfgang Jäger, *Die Überwindung der Teilung; and Karl-Rudolf Korte, Deutschlandpolitik in Helmut Kohls Kanzlerschaft* (all: Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1998).

⁶ Oskar Lafontaine, *The Heart Beats on the Left* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). Cf. Konrad H. Jarausch, "The Double Disappointment: Revolution, Unification and the German Intellectuals," Michael Geyer, ed., *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁷ Michael Meyer, *The Year that Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Scribner, 2009); and Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society*.

mation from Gorbachev's inner circle, fresh material on high politics has also become public knowledge during the last year.⁸ But there has not been much detailed empirical research like the impressive micro-studies of Michael Richter, which reconstruct the revolutionary process in Saxony on the level of individual towns.⁹ Nor have there been compelling new social science theories that might advance the academic debate. While Timothy Garton Ash conceded in the *New York Review of Books* that most of these publications add something to our knowledge, he came "away dreaming of another book, the global synthetic history of 1989 that remains to be written."¹⁰

The key paradox to be explained is the discrepancy between the seeming permanence of the Communist system and its subsequent rapid overthrow. Any interpretation has to begin with the sense of leaden immobility during the Brezhnev era in order to capture the surprise at the speed and extent with which the dramatic events unfolded in the fall of 1989.¹¹ Since the competing descriptions and explanations do not add up, three crucial questions have yet to be answered: What were the chief reasons for the collapse of communist power? In this regard, long-range causes ought to be distinguished from short-range factors that inspired the popular mobilization. How should the process of democratic awakening be interpreted? To resolve this issue, it is necessary to decide whether Communist rule simply collapsed or was overturned by a revolution, albeit without violence. Finally, what was the long-range impact of the many changes? For the sake of a fair evaluation, it is essential to ponder the ambivalent consequences of the post-Communist transformation, since it proved liberating and threatening at the same time.

⁸ "Thatcher told Gorbachev Britain did not want German reunification," *London Times*, September 9, 2009; and David Marsh, "Reflections on German Unification," *New Atlanticist* blog (November 5, 2009).

⁹ Michael Richter, *Die friedliche Revolution. Aufbruch und Demokratie in Sachsen 1989/90* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009), 2 vols.

¹⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, "1989!" and "Velvet Revolution: The Prospects," *New York Review of Books* (November 5 and December 3, 2009).

¹¹ For the older literature see Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

1. Causes

In trying to make sense of major caesuras, historians tend to distinguish between long-range structural causes and short-range reasons triggering actual changes. Among the former, one popular argument suggests that the stagnation of the planned economy made the Soviet bloc fall behind in the production of consumer goods and therefore inspired Gorbachev to push for perestroika in Russia. Another oft-cited factor was the improvement of the international climate that ended the second Cold War and promoted détente, because the lessening of hostility allowed Moscow to repeal the Brezhnev doctrine and thereby give up military control. Yet another argument claims that the greater latitude permitted to the satellite states also encouraged the revival of civil society and the formation of domestic opposition networks, pushing for the recovery of human rights. Less often mentioned, finally, is the loss of utopian belief and ideological self-confidence among the ruling Communist parties, which made some younger leaders break with the older incorrigibles and experiment with pragmatic reforms.¹²

Instead of arguing about the relative priority of international or domestic causes, it would be more productive to analyze how they reinforced one another in eroding Communist power. Ivan Behrend points out that the impact of the Oil Shocks, the transition to high technology and the pressure of globalization created economic problems in the COMECON which made it dependent upon international credits.¹³ Vladislav Zubok stresses the resulting need for ending the arms race and improving the international climate in order to revitalize the Russian system with Western assistance.¹⁴ Moreover, Timothy

¹² Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Weg in den Untergang. Der innere Zerfall der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999); and Klaus-Dietmar Henke, ed., *Revolution und Vereinigung. Als in Deutschland die Realität die Phantasie überholte* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009).

¹³ Ivan Berend, *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Garton Ash demonstrates how the spread of détente allowed dissent to grow in Poland as well as neighboring countries, signaling a recovery of civil society outside of repressive state structures.¹⁵ Finally, Michael Richter emphasizes that falling behind in the competition for consumer goods undercut ideological certainty within the Communist Parties and isolated the hardliners who wanted to put down the protests with military force.¹⁶ Since one factor alone was not strong enough, only their mutual reinforcement fatally weakened the power of the Communist system.

In his meticulous study of the fall of the Wall, Hans Hermann Hertle argues that it took a combination of extraordinary events to turn this structural erosion of Communism into an acute crisis.¹⁷ The initial challenge came from the formation of an independent Polish trade union, Solidarnosc, which even the proclamation of martial law could not contain permanently. Unrest grew with the decision of the liberal Hungarian leadership to open the Iron Curtain, triggering an exodus of vacationing East Germans to the West which turned into a mass flight that led to the fall of the Honecker regime. The movement culminated when public protests snowballed in cities like Leipzig and later also in Prague from a few hundred dissidents to hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, making it too large to be suppressed any longer by force. Confronted with such unheard-of civil resistance, the Communist parties themselves began to dissolve, losing members as well as their will to fight. While this sequence of events can easily be described, their precise interconnection still remains in dispute.¹⁸

Since the protests spread from one country to another as in 1848, the outbreak of the acute crisis ought to be analyzed as a transnational process. A foreign policy interpretation would point to Gorbachev's

¹⁵ Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Michael Richter, *Friedliche Revolution*, vol. 1: 136 ff, 2329 ff, 313 ff.

¹⁷ Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer. Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstauflösung des SED-Staates* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996).

¹⁸ Since most studies are focused on a single nation, comparisons like Helmut Fehr, *Unabhängige Öffentlichkeit und soziale Bewegungen. Fallstudien über Bürgerbewegungen in Polen und der DDR* (Opladen: Vs Verlag F R Sozialwissenschaften, 1996) remain rare.

policy shift which, according to the “Sinatra doctrine,” allowed the satellites to experiment with their own road to socialism, creating latitude for local concessions. A domestic comparison of the Soviet Bloc countries might highlight instead the ubiquity of the structural problems of Communism that created similar predicaments of economic stagnation and political repression, inspiring dissidents to make the same demands for human rights and better living standards everywhere. A more transnational perspective should call attention to the role of successful examples of challenging party authority in one country that emboldened protesters to imitate them in another, pushing them further with each additional step.¹⁹ While the international framework and the structural preconditions have been researched diligently, the ways in which the democratic awakening spread from one country to another have yet to be investigated systematically.

Another interpretative challenge consists of explaining the dynamics of the internal mobilization process which brought increasing numbers of people into the streets so that crowds eventually grew too large to be controlled. No doubt the contagion started with the dissidents themselves, who had elaborated a human rights critique of Communism like Charta 77 in Czechoslovakia or the IFM in the GDR. Crucial for spreading the message was also the reporting by West German media, which served as an alternative information source in East Germany, and by Radio Free Europe, which broadcast news to other East European countries. Even more decisive, however, was the experience of participating in a demonstration itself, because the feeling of solidarity in a big crowd of likeminded protesters broke through the grip of fear which had held people in check for so long. Less visible but highly debilitating was finally the seepage of doubt among the party members who had to decide whether to follow the Chinese example of bloody repression or risk Gorbachev’s perestroika reforms.²⁰

¹⁹ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of ‘89* and Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: 2002).

²⁰ Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique and Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 2009).

In reconstructing the mobilization process, Western social movement theory is of only limited use, because it is predicated on the existence of democratic rights. Analyzing the overthrow of dictatorial repression, backed by massive forces in the army, secret service, police and factory militia, requires a different kind of explanation than accounting for the rise of anti-nuclear protests in a liberal society. Building on Hirschman's terminology, the sociologist Stephen Pfaff has therefore argued that during the democratic awakening of 1989 exit and voice tended to reinforce each other rather than serve as alternatives.²¹ In the East German case, the mass exodus of the summer and fall exposed the rottenness of a regime that could no longer persuade its own citizens to stay. The loss of friends as well as the dramatic televised pictures emboldened dissidents to take to the streets, trying to reclaim their human rights. And eventually the majority of the population, dissatisfied with their meager living standards, joined the protests as well. In short, explaining the causes of 1989 requires linking long-range causes with short-range factors in a multicausal mobilization scenario.

2. Processes

Historians also need to conceptualize the nature of the 1989 upheaval more precisely. In contrast to Kotkin's thesis, Communism did not just implode from above but was rather overturned by mass pressure from below. The *Wende*, as it was called in the GDR, might rather be interpreted as a contestation which began as a movement to reform socialism and ended in its overthrow by turning into a veritable revolution. The early stages of the confrontation between the dissidents, the restive population and Communist cadres followed the traditional script of increasing civil unrest in which regime critics tried to recapture public space in order to express their frustration. The recovery of an increasing measure of human rights then allowed opposition groups to organize openly and mount a public challenge. Between September

²¹ Steven Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press, NC, 2006).

and November 1989 the demands of the chanted slogans and written posters escalated from calls for free speech to criticism of specific policies, eventually culminating in pressure to replace the regime as such. Hence the Communist rulers did not just abandon their power, but sought to preserve it by authorizing reform efforts that ultimately escaped their control.²²

Can the democratic awakening of the fall of 1989 be truly called a revolution? Impressed by the violence and utopianism of 1789, 1917, and 1949 many commentators hesitate to dignify events in their own lifetime with the term, because it suggests a superhuman heroism that they find doubtful. However, social theory has recently begun to treat revolutions as the most extreme case in a whole spectrum of “transgressive contentions” such as protests or rebellions, stressing both their structural and cultural dimensions.²³ Moreover, leading theorist Jack Goldstone defines revolution as “an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalized actions that undermine authorities.”²⁴ Clearly the movement to overthrow Communism in the GDR and Eastern Europe fulfills these criteria of fundamental change of political systems due to mass protests outside of established institutions. The decision on what to call the dramatic upheaval therefore depends not only on how contemporaries labeled the events but also on what criteria define a revolution analytically.

The democratic awakening of 1989 deviated from the expected pattern of revolutionary bloodshed, however, by remaining nonviolent and ultimately transferring power through negotiations in a process that resembled a pacted transition.²⁵ Though initially the protests teetered on the brink of violence, the massive security forces did not shoot

²² Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society* versus Richter, *Friedliche Revolution*, 2: 1465 ff.

²³ Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993); and Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁴ Jack Goldstone, “Towards a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 4 (2001): 139–87.

²⁵ George Lawson, *Negotiated Revolutions: The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile* (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2005), 70, argues for “a ‘conjunc-

(except in Romania), since the protesting citizens followed the call of religious leaders to remain non-violent. Because the weakening regime made reluctant concessions, such as the half-accidental opening of the Wall on November 9, the opposition was willing to negotiate with the ruling party in a series of Round Tables that maintained public order by opening a channel for the demands for change. Even the emotional confrontations over the dissolution of the secret service, called Stasi in the GDR, remained peaceful, since citizen committees succeeded in occupying its headquarters and sealing the remaining files. Sharing a similar revulsion at the Chinese bloodshed at Tiananmen square, both sides agreed on free elections which each hoped to win, allowing the question of power to be decided by nonviolent means.

The surprisingly peaceful character of this civil revolution in the GDR was therefore due to an exceptional amount of restraint by all actors who consciously chose to pursue their conflicting aims without violence. A crucial pre-condition was Gorbachev's repeal of the Brezhnev doctrine that kept the Red Army in its barracks and also indirectly held the GDR security forces in check. The actual break with the use of force on October 9th in Leipzig stemmed from a surprising coalition of dissidents trained in the peace movement, citizens afraid of the overwhelming power of the state, and party members unsure of how to react due to the succession struggle. Each of these groups pursued different aims: While the SED functionaries tried to salvage their power with concessions, the opposition wanted to democratize socialism, and the people preferred a social market economy. But all three agreed on organizing their competition through public dialogue, reluctant power-sharing, and round-table negotiations, with the final decision left up to free elections.²⁶ What ultimately needs to be explained is this procedural compromise that allowed for a peaceful transfer of power.

tural' schema that sees revolutions as complex amalgams of systemic crisis, structural opening and collective action."

²⁶ For recent versions of the "peaceful revolution" thesis see Erhard Neubert, *Unsere Revolution. Die Geschichte der Jahre 1989/90* (Munich: Piper, 2008), and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Endspiel. Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: Beck, 2009).

Another major difference from some prior revolutions was the unforeseen revival of nationalism which dissolved the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, but also restored German unity. In the Soviet Bloc, socialist internationalism had long suppressed ethno-national aspirations, since it justified Russian hegemony and limited independence desires to the struggle against imperialism. But a growing wish for self-determination fueled the dissident movements in Poland and Hungary, making their Communist leadership willing to accept those compromises with the opposition that have been called a "refolution."²⁷ Spreading from the Baltic States into other Russian provinces, this nationalist wave eventually swept away the Soviet Union, since the patriotic pull proved too strong. While the Czechs and the Slovaks parted company in peaceful fashion, Serbian resistance to greater regional autonomy triggered a bloody civil conflict that yielded Slovenian and Croatian independence, but tore Bosnia and Kosovo apart.²⁸ Toppling regimes and reshaping boundaries, this resurgence of nationalism largely restored the map of the inter-war period in Eastern Europe.

In the German case, the national form of the transformation was the result of East German desire for a better life which the FRG's leaders could not ignore. The SED was opposed to ending division, since, unlike in Poland, there was no reason for the GDR to exist without socialism; most dissidents had reservations about capitalist democracy and preferred to democratize socialism, but ordinary East Germans were impressed with Western prosperity and freedom, wishing to join the FRG as soon as possible. Though the younger generation of West Germans had given up on unity, the Constitutional Court had reaffirmed the unification mandate of the Basic Law. While the SPD's *Ostpolitik* had paved the way to détente, chancellor Kohl

²⁷ Beate Ihme-Tuchel, "Wende, Implosion, Umbruch, Revolution oder 'Refolution' in der DDR? Versuche zur Einordnung eines historischen Großereignisses nach 15 Jahren," *Europa und Deutschland – Deutschland und Europa* (2005): 322–34.

²⁸ Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Eastern Europe* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1998).

of the CDU gambled his career on actual unification, overcoming domestic reluctance and foreign opposition by deftly orchestrating a “rush to German unity.”²⁹ Hence the two-plus-four negotiations allowed the bankrupt GDR to join the FRG, restoring a chastened German state as a bridge that rejoined Eastern and Western Europe. In retrospect it still seems astounding that such a fundamental transformation of Europe could remain largely peaceful and benign.

3. Results

The consequences of the upheaval also need to be included into any interpretation, since only by analyzing their nature can one determine the depth of the post-Communist rupture. According to this criterion the transformation seems truly revolutionary, since it left hardly any sphere of life, be it public or private, untouched. The domestic transition from dictatorship to democracy was complicated by the lack of popular experience with parliamentary government, the involvement of former Communist cadres, and the transfer of a functioning democratic system from the FRG to the new Eastern states. The transformation from a planned to a market economy turned out to be even more traumatic, since the concurrent adjustment to global competition destroyed much moribund industry and thereby created massive unemployment. Also, the social reorientation from state-subsidized egalitarianism and group solidarity to individual responsibility and competitive stratification was quite upsetting.³⁰ In contrast, intellectuals and the public welcomed the return of cultural pluralism since it increased creative freedom and offered more interesting popular entertainment.

²⁹ Andreas Rödger, *Deutschland, einig Vaterland. Die Geschichte der Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009) portrays the events largely from a Western governmental perspective.

³⁰ Klaus Schroeder, *Die veränderte Republik. Deutschland nach der Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: Vögel, 2006) and Manfred Görtemaker, *Die Berliner Republik. Wiedervereinigung und Neuorientierung* (Berlin: Be.Bra Verlag, 2009).

In the social sciences, the effort to analyze the post-Communist transition has spawned a cottage industry of “transformation research” that sought to assess the degree of its likely success. While political scientists attempted to measure the halting progress of democratization, economists investigated the disruptive effects of the return to the market, and sociologists looked at the dissolution of solidarity through the resurgence of individualism.³¹ Such research has produced valuable statistical material for a comparative assessment of transitions from dictatorial regimes which underscores the depth of the rupture due to the overthrow of communism, but it remains wedded to a normative paradigm that sees the adoption of the Western model of capitalist democracy as a necessary form of modernization. In the German context the discussion is also complicated by the fact that the transformation came in the guise of reunification, which transferred not only the Western system but also elites from the FRG to manage the multitude of changes. To dramatize its unsettling effect, Jürgen Kocka, a leading historian, has labeled the transition a “unification crisis.”³²

On the whole, the international repercussions of the dissolution of the Soviet bloc were largely constructive for Eastern Europe, since its peoples regained a sense of self-determination. The end of the Cold War hastened the departure of the Russian troops, a precondition for independence, and the conclusion of the arms race made considerable disarmament possible. The massive costs of unification also kept the Germans from becoming an openly hegemonic power, forcing them instead to concentrate on the task of rehabilitating the five new member states and the prior capital of Berlin. No doubt, the nationalism which reemerged from under the cover of socialist internationalism also led to ugly confrontations, but the civil war in the former Yugoslavia remained an exception, predicated upon an earlier history of deep-seated Balkan enmities. Even if it merely expanded existing Western institutions, the lifting of the Iron Curtain allowed the

³¹ Richard Rose, *Understanding Post-Communist Transition: A Bottom up Approach* (London: Routledge, 2009); Aurel Croissant and Wolfgang Merkel, eds., “Consolidated or Defective Democracies? Problems of Regime Change,” Special Issue of *Democratization* vol. 11, no. 5 (December 2004).

³² Jürgen Kocka, *Vereinigungskrise. Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1995).

East Central Europeans to reconnect with Western Europe by joining NATO and the EU, thereby reuniting the Old Continent and stabilizing the new post-Communist governments.³³

Perhaps commentaries on the international consequences have been too focused on current policy issues to appreciate the long-range significance of the reemergence of independent nation states in Eastern Europe. No doubt, deciding how far to expand NATO's security umbrella, which states to accept as EU members, or how to respond to terrorism has preoccupied most of the politicians concerned. But a historical perspective also ought to ponder the implications of the resurgence of a nationally fragmented *Zwischeneuropa* between a weakened Russia and a chastened Germany that revived the general map of Brest-Litovsk without Wilhemine imperialism, while dismantling two Versailles barrier states.³⁴ Not just the odd survival of the Kaliningrad enclave raises the question of how stable such a system will be in the long run, especially since Moscow does not seem content with the loss of some of its prior possessions. Fortunately the multilateral security architecture of NATO and the economic integration of the EU provide some guarantees against slipping back into inter-war chaos. Since a new OSCE architecture failed to come about, this whole issue deserves more critical reflection.

The price of freedom, moreover, has been a wrenching adjustment that has led to resentment among displaced elites, depression among dissidents and disappointment in the population at large. Western-style democracy has turned out to be cumbersome, much less exciting than the direct participation during the heady days of 1989. Coping with economic competition, dealing with unemployment and facing insecurity was hard for many people accustomed to the safety net of socialist welfare. Western financial transfers and investments had strings of outside control attached and the staggering amount needed – more than 1.5 trillion Euros in the German case alone – was never enough

³³ Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) overemphasizes the “prefab” argument of merely expanding existing institutions.

³⁴ For a broader perspective one almost has to go back to Rene Albrecht-Carrie, *A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973).

to create “flourishing landscapes” overnight. The psychological adjustment that was required by the new circumstances proved difficult for a population which had gotten used to suppressing its feelings, but now had to express them in public in order to gain attention.³⁵ While some complaints, like those of Communist victims, merely pled for special compensation, the ubiquity of the grumbling indicates a wider disenchantment with the consequences of the rupture.

The cultural responses to the post-communist transition have, therefore, been somewhat ambivalent. While elite cadres like the historian Kurt Pätzold loudly complain about the injustice of their professional displacement, members of previously suppressed groups like the theologian Richard Schroeder praise the liberating effects of the transformation.³⁶ In the population, the media-driven scandalization of the Communist regime, exploiting accusations of collaboration with the secret police (Stasi), has led to a widespread resentment over the seemingly wholesale devaluation of previous lives.³⁷ In defiance many Easterners have therefore adopted a GDR identity after the fact, since they feel like second-class citizens in a united Germany, nostalgically recalling the putative warmth of the welfare-dictatorship while forgetting its ugly repression.³⁸ Only gradually has a more ironic detachment made headway by producing films like *Goodbye Lenin* or novels like *Der Turm*.³⁹ The difficulties of the domestic transformation, interna-

³⁵ Gerhard A Ritter, *Der Preis der deutschen Einheit. Die Wiedervereinigung und die Krise des deutschen Sozialstaats* (Munich: Beck Juristischer Verlag, 2006).

³⁶ Ingrid Matschenz, Kurt Pätzold, Erika Schwarz, Sonja Strignitz, eds., *Dokumente gegen Legenden. Chronik und Geschichte der Abwicklung der MitarbeiterInnen des Instituts für Geschichtswissenschaften an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* (Berlin: Mass Verlag, 1996) versus Richard Schroeder, *Die wichtigsten Irrtümer über die deutsche Einheit* (Herder: Freiburg, 2007).

³⁷ Andrew Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries into East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008); and Martin Sabrow, ed., *Der Streit um die Erinnerung* (Leipzig: Beck, 2008).

³⁸ Thomas Ahbe, *Ostalgie. Zum Umgang mit der DDR Vergangenheit in den 1990er Jahren* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2005); and Karen Leeder, *From Stasiland to Ostalgie: The GDR Twenty Years After* (London: Maney, 2009).

³⁹ Wolfgang Becker, *Goodbye Lenin* (Sony video, 2004); and Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Turm* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008). Cf. also Ingo Schulze, *Neue Leben* (Berlin: DTV Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2005).

tional restructuring and personal adaptation need to be more directly included in any discussion about whether this was, indeed, a negative or positive change.

4. A New Model

The concept that comes closest to describing the exhilarating events of 1989 is the notion of a new kind of revolution, stemming from “people power.”⁴⁰ In contrast to earlier caesuras of the twentieth century, the fall of the Wall was neither the product of a world war nor of the imposition of a dictatorship. Instead, the democratic awakening started as another attempt to liberalize Communism, but unlike in 1953, 1956, 1968 or 1981 the popular movement managed to overthrow the system because it was not stopped by tanks. While the structural erosion of communist power prepared the ground, the mass exodus unleashed a growing mobilization in the GDR, since the gerontocratic party leaders proved helpless once they could no longer resort to force. Spurred by the claim “We are the people!” the phenomenal rise in protest participation generated a sense of popular empowerment that proved irresistible precisely because it demonstrated that the Communist rulers were not really serving the population. In contrast to all the earlier failures, the success of 1989 might be interpreted as a result of mounting civil resistance which initially sought to democratize socialism but ultimately dared to abolish it altogether.

Aided by favorable international circumstances, the process became revolutionary when its demands escalated from human rights via policy changes to the overthrow of the Communist dictatorship. In the three-cornered contest between dissidents, the party and the population, each group played an important role. The opponents had the courage to challenge the regime, the imagination to offer critical alternatives, and the resolution to create civic associations like the New Forum. Ignoring its hardliners, the ruling party renounced the use of force and entered a political contest which it could not win,

⁴⁰ These observations largely agree with Ash, “Velvet Revolution,” *passim* although the term ‘Velvet Revolution’ somewhat underplays the fact that mass protests also constitute a form of political force.

since it underestimated the degree of public disaffection, but thereby also helped its members to transition into a post-communist order. Initially on the sidelines, the general public joined the demonstrations en masse, voiced its wishes for higher living-standards, repudiated the intellectuals' search for a Third Way and instead chose proven solutions like the Basic Law or the social market economy.⁴¹ New about 1989 was therefore not the outcome that transferred Western institutions, but rather the process that managed to find a peaceful path towards regime change against all odds.

In spite of subsequent disappointment in transition problems, the overthrow of Communism had momentous consequences that can hardly be exaggerated. The democratic awakening ended four decades of domestic dictatorship, Stasi repression and material shortages that had enslaved East Europeans. The two-plus-four negotiations solved the "German problem" that had bedeviled Europe since 1871 by restoring a diminished and democratized nation state with accepted frontiers. The fall of the Wall also finished the Cold War, which had brought the world to the brink of nuclear catastrophe. The collapse of Communism pulled the Soviet Union down with it, since the desire for national self-determination brought statehood to areas like Ukraine or Belarus that had been part of the Russian Empire. The revival of East Central European independence finally overcame the division of Europe and extended Western security and economic organizations like NATO and the EU until the Russian frontiers.⁴² Even if these changes did not usher in the "end of history," the caesura of 1989 signals the conclusion of the struggle between Communism and Democracy that had marked much of the short twentieth century in Europe.

By toppling Communism, Eastern Europeans created a new model of negotiated transition, which not only replaced a government,

⁴¹ Konrad H. Jarausch, "Kollaps des Kommunismus oder Aufbruch der Zivilgesellschaft. Zur Einordnung der friedlichen Revolution von 1989," in Eckart Conze, Katharina Gajdukowa and Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten, eds., *Die demokratische Revolution 1989 in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 25–45.

⁴² Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 585 ff, 637 ff.

but also overturned an entire political and social system without violence. Prefigured in the overthrow of authoritarianism in Portugal and the Philippines, this novel form of rebellion relied on mass demonstrations, media dramatization and international support to generate sufficient force so as to compel the recovery of civil rights and of policy concessions. The crucial bargain between the increasingly discredited but powerful rulers and the legitimate but still powerless opposition involved an open-ended electoral contest that gave the former elite an opportunity to preserve some of their privileges while offering the protesters the chance to seize the reins. In 1989 this scenario succeeded because of the stalling of the socialist economies, the spread of détente, the courage of the opposition and the dissolution of the party. Requiring such rather special preconditions, this model may not be a universal panacea, since China and Iran have drowned similar efforts in blood. But its success in Ukraine and Serbia does hold out some hope for a nonviolent form of revolutionary change elsewhere.⁴³

⁴³ Timothy Garton Ash, "A Century of Civil Resistance: Some Lessons and Questions," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*, 371–90. The debate during the Oxford conference from which the volume originated pointed out that it is important not to romanticize the notion of civil resistance.

CORNEL BAN

Was 1989 the End of Social Democracy?

1989 and Social Democracy

Did 1989 put the last nail in the coffin of European social democracy? Some scholars have echoed the popular view that whereas the social-democratic parties of Europe began to get closer to economic liberalism during the 1980s, it was not until 1989 that their “need to cut loose from the past” saw a marked surge. Anthony Giddens wrote that social democrats’ “need to cut loose from the past received a further dynamic charge from the collapse of east European communism in 1989.”¹ Tony Blair echoed him by linking the rise of the Third Way to the “death of socialism.” And even acerbic critics of the Third Way like Tony Judt saw 1989 as one of the most decisive moments in the existential history of social democracy, based on his reading of 1989 as “the death knell of a 200-year promise of social progress.”²

Such arguments imply that there was some kind of affinity between social democracy and Leninism through their common origins in the Marxian legacy, and that the end of one would entail the moderation the other. But why would this be the case? Why would the loss of the social-democratic faith in progress and eventual flirtation with conservative economics be tied to the fate of real-existing socialism, given their very different readings of the objectives of politics before and then during the Cold War? Why would the social democrats’ abandonment of Keynesianism, the economic paradigm meant to save the

¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 17.

² Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).

market economy, have anything systematic to do with the terminal crisis of East European central planning when Keynesianism had been a *faux pas* in this region even before the Berlin Wall went up?

This paper argues that 1989 came after Western social democracy had abandoned the revisionist terms of the postwar welfare Keynesianism and forged the terms of a “Third Way” compromise between neoclassical economics and a “social-liberal” reading of the welfare state. The historical evidence suggests that the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe happened years after European social democrats had abandoned some of the main pillars of their postwar socio-economic project. Thus, rather than be affected by the meltdown of real-existing socialism, the causes of social democracy’s decline were instead endogenous to debates within real-existing social democracy. This should not come as a surprise. Social democracy and state socialism had been ideological foes for almost seventy years and, Hayek’s doomsday predictions notwithstanding, West European social-democratic institutions deepened political liberalism rather than throw it down the slippery slope to totalitarianism.

The contribution of this article to the literature is twofold. First, it provides the first systematic attempt at clarifying the connection between 1989 and the decay of “classical” social democracy. Second, while previous scholarship on the crisis of social democracy emphasized the role of material constraints, this chapter contributes to those emerging constructivist readings of this crisis that emphasize the importance of economic ideas rather than of political party ideology. To this end, the bulk of the paper examines very closely the intellectual context within which social democracy lived its transition from Keynesian to orthodox neoclassical (or “neoliberal”) economics during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The contribution first historicizes the definition of social democracy in order to clarify what this concept meant before 1989. Next, it delves in a comparative analysis of the intellectual and institutional pillars of the Keynesian moment, its crisis and the eventual rise of neoliberalism. The last section of the paper uses secondary literature to look at the timing of the opening of social democratic parties’ opening to neoliberalism.

What Was Social Democracy?

THE CORE AND THE PERIPHERY OF THE CONCEPT

Born as a revisionist Marxist project at the cusp of the twin ideological crisis of late nineteenth-century orthodox Marxism and classic liberalism,³ social democracy became known as a political ideology, movement and institutional complex geared to tailor capitalism to the interests of workers and the lower middle classes via the political conduits of bourgeois democracy and the building cross-class political alliances. Yet beyond this definitional “core” one also sees a lot of temporal variation. Indeed, social democracy saw deep transformations during the past 120 years by going from a revisionist reading of Marx in the first decades of the twentieth century to representing one of the more progressive readings of liberalism towards the end of the century.

Thus, the first period was marked by the publication of the foundational work of Eduard Bernstein in 1899 and the synthesis of Keynesianism and social democratic ideology in the foundational act of the Swedish model: the Saltsjobaden agreements of 1936. This was an age when social democracy was a revisionist Marxist political movement of the working class pushing for social, economic and political reforms, yet without an economic paradigm of its own to address economic life under capitalism. Next came a period that can be dubbed classical social democracy, whose basic identity markers were the abandonment of central Marxist tenets and the embrace of Keynesian

³ On the liberal front, the challenge of various communitarianisms (religious, nationalist) led to the emergence of social liberalism, an intellectual tradition that wanted to save the capitalist order by addressing claims for more social justice in industrial societies marred by egregious political and economic inequalities. The first articulation of social-liberalism was the British New Liberalism during the Edwardian era and L.T. Hobhouse's *Liberalism* (New York: Galaxy Press, 1911). For an overview of social liberalism see Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). For a contrast between social liberalism and social democracy see Peter F. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

economics. Thus, between 1936 and 1982 social democrats used Keynesianism as the underlying economic policy paradigm to achieved most of the reformist agenda conceived during the revisionist Marxist decades while forging big compromises with capital. The end of this period was symbolically marked by the rightward turn in 1982 of the beacon of social democracy: the Swedish SAP. During this phase, which can be termed “Third Way,” social democrats terminated their commitments to Keynesianism and pursued socio-economic policies anchored in a more orthodox neoclassical intellectual blueprint while generally keeping their commitment to the welfare state. It is to the analysis of each of these phases that I now turn.

TRANSFORMATION: SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AS REVISIONIST MARXISM (1899–1936)

I do not believe, either, that there will necessarily be an abrupt leap, the crossing of the abyss; perhaps we shall be aware of having entered the zone of the Socialistic State as navigators are aware of having crossed the line of a hemisphere— not that they have been able to see as they crossed a cord stretched over the ocean warning them of their passage, but that little by little they have been led into a new hemisphere by the progress of their ship.

*Jean Jaures*⁴

As the quote from Jean Jaures suggests, social democracy marked a redefinition of Marxism away from the focus on revolution as a cataclysmic event and toward revolution as a gradual process of consensual but nevertheless *socialist* transformation of society-market relations. The basic idea during this period was to transform capitalism so deeply that at some point social democratic reforms would usher the world into socialism through a process so gradual that the shift itself would not be noticed.

⁴ Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 30.

This transformation revolved around two main objectives. The first was immediate and consisted of reforming capitalism through parliamentary means so as to advance the political and economic rights of those who lived off selling their labor for a wage. The second objective was most distant and consisted of bringing about the socialization of the means of production through the ballot box, with electoral reversal being interpreted not as invitation to hasten the course of history, but as evidence that the moment was not yet ripe for socialist transformation. The reformist agenda included such concrete items as political secularization, universal education, social insurance, progressive taxation, state and municipal economic activities to mop up the unemployed, legislation on work conditions, old age and sickness benefits, freedom of speech and assembly etc. By contrast with their immediate list of political reforms, transition to socialism had a relatively abstract list of goals: abolish exploitation, the destruction of class divisions, the removal of all political, cultural and economic inequalities, the end of capitalist production, the building of cooperative economic institutions serving genuine rather than created human needs, freedom, rationality and justice. Since socialism was deemed inevitable, the struggle for the former was not deemed to be a departure from the latter. Moreover, as one scholar put it, in this early social-democratic scenario it was thought that “at some point mitigation becomes transformation, attenuation becomes abolition and at some point capitalism’s ‘concessions’ annihilate capitalism.”⁵

These objectives were born from a *fin de siècle* revisionist drive inside Marxism. As liberals were reinventing the center and broaching a liberal argument for the welfare state and state intervention in the economy, Eduard Bernstein began to take issue with the predictive failures of orthodox Marxism and to deemphasize the possibility of an immediate transition to socialism on the political agenda.⁶ Rather than “lead with the certainty of doom to the shipwreck of capitalist production,” as Kautsky had prophesied, capitalist relations had emerged from crises with renewed vigor. Instead of being completely instrumentalized by capitalists, the bourgeois state had begun to show signs of autonomy

⁵ Benjamin Barber cited in Przeworski, *Capitalism*, 31.

⁶ See Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York: Schocken, 1961).

and began not only to devise instruments to “save capitalism from capitalists” (prudential regulations, complex commercial codes etc), but also to respond to workers’ contestation with social and economic reforms. This became more obvious as the early twentieth century wore on. Thus, in Britain the Liberal governments of the Edwardian era reacted to labor union activism by establishing the first institutions of the welfare state and, as a result of such political interventions, by 1914 the wages, the working conditions and the political voice of the British proletariat had improved dramatically. Similarly, when social-democrats in Belgium and Sweden organized mass strikes to obtain universal (male) suffrage, the bourgeois state ultimately gave in.

Rather than putting history on fast-forward, as the Leninist strategy envisioned,⁷ social democrats saw parliamentary politics as the preferred *and* sufficient avenue⁸ towards a more humane capitalism at first and a progressive replacement of capitalist property by social property later on. As Jaures put it, democracy was ‘the largest and most solid terrain on which the working class can stand . . . the bedrock that the reactionary bourgeoisie cannot dissolve without opening fissures in the earth and throwing itself into them.’

From Austro-Marxists to Swedish social democrats,⁹ the center of the social-democratic strategy was to refrain from the orthodox

⁷ While both Lenin and Luxemburg expected counter-revolution if socialism triumphed at the polls, according to Adam Przeworski “on several occasions Marx entertained the possibility that in England or in Holland counter-revolution would not occur if workers won the majority in the parliament.” In Przeworski, *Capitalism*, 25.

⁸ Cited in Leslie Derfler, *Socialism since Marx: A Century of the European Left* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 59.

⁹ William E. Paterson and Alastair H. Thomas (eds.), *Social Democratic Parties in Western Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); Carl Landauer, *European Socialism*, vol. I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905–1917* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1955); William A. Lafferty, *Economic Development and the Response of Labour in Scandinavia* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971); Steven Koblick, ed., *Sweden’s Development from Poverty to Affluence, 1750–1970* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975); Herbet Tingsten, *The Swedish Social Democrats* (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminister, 1973); Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in Politics of Labor* (London: Merlin Press, 1975).

Marxists' choice to wait for the collapse of capitalism and to actively fight for socio-economic reforms that would lead to the overcoming of capitalism through evolutionary, non-violent and coalition-based *political* processes. The dream of overcoming capitalism remained, but at this time social democrats saw liberal democracy as finite and insisted that their project was about extending democracy from the political to the economic realm. Yet, despite their fears that the outcome of the electoral struggle would be their own suppression,¹⁰ the bottom line for social democrats was a clear rejection of the orthodox thesis of scientific progress towards that goal and the extra-parliamentary means of achieving it.

This strategy was neither linear nor uncontested inside the social-democratic movement of the first half of the twentieth century, as even the Swedish and the Austrian parties showed skepticism that should the social-democrats win the elections and cut the privileges of the dominant class, the latter would resort to violence rather than stick to the parliamentary course.¹¹ Hence the social-democratic dilemma of the day, as summarized by Gay in his biography of Bernstein:

Is democratic socialism, then, impossible? Or can it be achieved only if the party is willing to abandon the democratic method temporarily to attain power by violence in the hope that it may return to parliamentarism as soon as control is secure. Surely this second alternative contains tragic possibilities: a democratic movement that resorts to authoritarian methods to gain its objective may not remain a democratic movement for long. Still, the first alternative—to cling to democratic procedures under all circumstances—may doom the party to continual political impotence.”

Or, as Sheri Berman argued:

[Bernstein] advocated replacing historical materialism and class struggle with a belief in the primacy of politics and the value of cross-class cooperation—a conviction that individuals, moti-

¹⁰ Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 7.

¹¹ Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism*, 26

vated by belief in a better world, could band together and use the power of the democratic state to gradually reshape the world around them.”¹²

The social-democratic commitment to a parliamentary road to socialism was consolidated rather than weakened when workers' strikes demanding more economic rights were being defeated in one country after another and resulted in more repression and decimation of union membership.¹³ At first, social democrats thought that reformist objectives and socialism itself were to be achieved through the activism of social-democratic parties and trade unions that would appeal to industrial workers. But when it became obvious that the proletarian class was not bound to become a majority of the population in even the most advanced industrial societies of Europe, social democrats gradually abandoned the commitment to being a party of this class and instead began to forge cross-class appeals towards ‘workers by brain,’ lower middle classes and small peasants while seeking alliances with progressive liberals. By mid-century, cross-class appeals and electoralism became the hallmark of European social democracy.

Yet even when they controlled governments during the 1920s, social democrats agonized for many years on whether they should nationalize the “commanding heights” of the economy as a first big step to socialism. Owing to the technical difficulties of the matter,¹⁴ none actually ended this deliberation and all limited themselves to ad hoc measures meant to improve the conditions of workers (minimum wage, income taxes, old age benefits, affordable housing), but which were nevertheless consistent with the economic philosophy of the reform liberal-conservatism of Bismarck and Disraeli. This was tantamount to paralysis on economic policy. As Przeworski put it,

¹² Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 43.

¹³ See Przeworski, *Capitalism* 12.

¹⁴ As Przeworski wrote, “[t]he choice of industries which were to be nationalized, methods of financing, techniques of management, and the mutual relations among sectors turned out to be technical problems for which social democrats were unprepared. Hence they formed study commissions and waited.” Idem, 34.

The economic theory of the Left was the theory that criticized capitalism, claimed the superiority of socialism, and led to a programme of nationalization of the means of production. Once this programme was suspended—it was not yet abandoned—no socialist economic policy was left. Socialists behaved like all other parties: with some distributional bias toward their constituency but full of respect for the golden principles of the balanced budget, deflationary anti-crisis policies, gold standard, and so on.¹⁵

More specifically, the first source of the paralysis was that any gains made in income redistribution were wiped out by the recurrent crises of capitalism.¹⁶ The second was that the interests of workers were still understood as particularistic rather than universalistic, thus giving labor-capital relations a distinctive zero-sum game flavor.¹⁷ The embrace of Keynesian economics by social democrats after 1936 and particularly after the war fully addressed these challenges and ushered social democracy into its “golden age” or “classical” era. This era changed the nature of capitalism from a “laissez faire” to an “administered” variety and made workers’ demands to increase consumption from a challenge to national interest to legitimate requirements to kick-start investment through increases in aggregate demand during crises.

MITIGATION: CLASSICAL SOCIAL DEMOCRACY (1936–1982)

The trouble about the revolutionary left in stable industrial societies is not that its opportunities never came, but that the normal conditions in which it must operate prevent it from developing the movements likely to seize the rare moments when they are called upon to behave as revolutionaries. . . . Being a revolutionary in countries such as ours just happens to be difficult.

*Eric Hobsbawm*¹⁸

¹⁵ Idem, 35.

¹⁶ Fritz Wilhelm Scharf, *Crisis and Choice in European Social Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 22.

¹⁷ Przeworski, *Capitalism*, 37.

¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London: Abacus, 1973), 14–15.

And indeed difficult it was, as the “normal conditions” of capitalism had been dramatically altered by social democracy just as social democracy was reneging on its belief that its reforms constituted cumulative steps towards the overcoming of capitalism in a distant and undefined future. From focusing on transformation social democracy became a movement for the mitigation of the functioning of capitalism.

As Leninism came to reign supreme in much of Eastern Europe, following the implosion of the far right in the West, social democracy became the party of the radical reform of capitalism¹⁹ and ruled over Western Europe and became the most successful socio-political paradigm of the postwar years.²⁰ Its ideas were shared by progressive liberals and conservatives alike. From Belgium to Austria, reform objectives like generous welfare states and labor regulations, steeply progressive taxation systems, and employment-producing/maintaining public sectors were often achieved with the consent of ruling liberal-conservative coalitions. Moreover, contra claims made by Marxist analysis of social democracy that reforms will be done without reducing inequality,²¹ the policies of many social democratic governments effectively reduced social inequalities of nearly every kind. As the golden age of social democracy was coming to an end in the 1970s, scholars found that the more democracy and social democratic rule a country had experienced, the lowest the share of national income taken by the highest income categories and the larger the share of the national income being distributed.²² During this time social-democratic parties

¹⁹ The emblematic moment of this process of ideological mainstreaming was the abandonment of revolutionary Marxism and the adoption of the “catch-all” party strategy by the German SPD at its congress in Bad Godesberg in 1959.

²⁰ The data shows that embedded liberalism generated both better long-term economic performance *and* social protection than its laissez-faire predecessor and neoliberal successor. See Robert Skidelsky, *Keynes. The Return of the Master: Why Sixty Years after His Death, John Maynard Keynes is the Most Important Economic Thinker for America* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009).

²¹ See Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

²² Christopher Hewitt, “The Effect of Political Democracy and Social democracy on Equality in Industrial Societies: A Cross-National Comparison” *American Sociological Review* vol. 42, no. 3 (1977): 450–64.

also defined the “best practices” of political modernity in conditions of liberal democracy in that they developed a solid and consistent mass base via complex party organizations and affiliated networks. They also created social democratic organizations as “communities of solidarity,” with their own subcultures and informal socialization mechanisms.²³

To a great extent the fortunes of the “classic” social-democratic socio-economic model that dominated Western Europe’s first three postwar decades relied on the economic institutions of “embedded liberalism,”²⁴ whereby partial trade liberalization was combined with domestic institutions that cushioned the socially deleterious effects of market dislocations through fixed rates and capital controls.²⁵ Most importantly, however, the social-democratic project rested on the ideas of Keynesian economics.²⁶

²³ Gerassimos Moschonas, *In the Name of Social Democracy: The Great Transformation, 1945 to the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 146. Also See Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy – The History of the Left in Europe: 1850–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁴ John Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” *International Organization* vol. 36, no. 2 (Spring, 1982): 379–415 and Rawi Abdelal and John Ruggie, “The Principles of Embedded Liberalism: Social Legitimacy and Global Capitalism” in David Moss and John Cisternino, eds., *New Perspectives on Regulation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Tobin Project, 2009), 151–62.

²⁵ See Peter J. Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets: Industrial Policy in Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985). Specifically, Ruggie takes a bit of terminology from Polanyi and talks about “Embedded Liberalism.” Polanyi used the word embedded to refer to the relationship between the economy and society. Before the “three fictitious commodities” were commodified, the economy was embedded in society. When the economy was dis-embedded from society, that is what caused the great turmoil that eventually lead to the rise of fascism and the horrible events of World War II. Ruggie, along a similar vein, wants to make the eventual claim that a liberal economic order was embedded within society.

²⁶ See J.M. Keynes, “Am I a Liberal?” (1925). For Keynes’ political views see Gilles Dostaler, “La vision politique de Keynes”, in G. Boismenu and G. Dostaler, eds., *La “Théorie générale” et le keynésianisme* (Montréal: ACFAS, 1987), 75–90; Fitzgibbons, Athol, *Keynes’s Vision: A New Political Economy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes* vol. 2, *The Economist as Saviour: 1920–1937* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

Keynes's progressive liberalism was quite radical, however. Although during the Great Depression he had been on the left of the Labor party, Keynes' embraced political liberalism and dug, successfully for a while, the grave of laissez-faire economic liberalism. Although he was an elitist patrician who was almost mechanically skeptical of the capacity of the organized working class to look after its own business, in today's parlance he was decidedly a man of the economic left. His political fantasy was a coalition between left liberals and Fabians able to eviscerate the fortunes of conservatism and laissez faire liberalism. Contrary to classic liberals he thought that the government should curtail market freedoms drastically in order to ensure full employment and a fair redistribution of income, fortune and opportunities. In 1925, he wrote that "[t]he transition from economic anarchy to a régime which deliberately aims at controlling and directing economic forces in the interest of social justice and social stability, will present enormous difficulties both technical and political. I suggest, nevertheless, that the true destiny of New Liberalism is to seek their solution.

The angular stone of the new paradigm was Keynes' *General Theory* (1936), an initially obscure book proposing a theory where involuntary unemployment²⁷ was attributed to a deficiency in aggregate demand.²⁸ The main point of the *General Theory* offered the scientific basis to social-democratic politics: economic inequality and insecurity under capitalism could be reduced via government interventions that did not reduce economic performance.²⁹ After the Second World War, what was understood as "Keynesianism" was in fact a synthesis

²⁷ Keynes defined involuntary unemployment as a situation when some people are willing to participate in the labor market at the given wage or even at a lower wage yet are unable to act on this choice. For a discussion of the Keynesian definition see F. H. Hahn, "Of Marx and Keynes and Many Things," *Oxford Economic Papers* vol. 38, no. 2 (July 1986): 354–61.

²⁸ Keynes' qualitative insights were formalized a year later by three economists (James Meade, Roy Harrod, and John Hicks 1937) who saw in the *General Theory* the opportunity to reconcile neoclassical orthodoxy with Keynes' arguments.

²⁹ See Peter Hall, ed., *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and Roger Backhouse, *Explorations in Economic Methodology: From Lakatos to Empirical Philosophy of Science* (London: Routledge, 1998).

between neoclassical economics and the “orthodox” Keynes of the General Theory.

As Keynesian economist Kalecki noted, Keynes’ intellectual innovations changed the very nature of capitalism by creating a unity of interest between the unemployed, the employed and the employers in expansionary policies aimed at ensuring full employment: unemployment was insignificant, the employed got higher wages and more rights while capitalists made higher profits than under *laissez faire*.³⁰ On top of everything, by doing this Keynesianism made the social democrats’ agony over the issue of nationalization irrelevant, as instead of direct ownership the social democratic state could achieve its objectives by influencing capitalists to behave in the interest of workers. Through Keynes, the road to compromise with capitalists became imaginable for social democrats who now expected that through savings, investments and redistribution the current profits of capitalists would be transformed into better and better material conditions for wage earners, to the point that their lives would become less and less commodified. Rather than radically transforming it, social democrats thus improved capitalism and mitigated its effects on wage earners, often against the will of capitalists themselves.

The Keynesian policy paradigm adopted by postwar governments departed from the assumption that the private sector was fundamentally unstable to emphasize the role of the government in influencing growth rates, employment and production through a combination of fiscal and monetary policies. This policy paradigm was based in an intellectual consensus shared by mainstream economists throughout Western Europe and North America, with the notable exception of Germany, where ordoliberal views constrained the effects of the brief 1966-1973 Keynesian interlude.³¹ By contrast with “fundamentalist

³⁰ Michael Kalecki, *Political Quarterly* vol. 14, no. 4 (1943): 322–31.

³¹ Juergen Backhaus’ survey of the adoption of Keynesian ideas in Germany concluded that in this country Keynesians “emphasized productivity, capital formation, fiscal conservatism and an entrepreneurial approach to the attainment of public purposes. It was not designed for intervention, but participation in the market.” (Jürgen G. Backhaus, “An Essay on Keynesianism in Germany” in T. Lawson and M.H. Pesaran, eds., *Keynes’ Economics: Methodological Issues* [London: Croom Helm, 1985], 243). Christopher S. Allen, “The Underdevelopment of Keynesianism

Keynesianism,”³² in the neo-Keynesian model the neoclassical model of Smith and Marshall was assumed to hold in the long-run, while the Keynesian one was applicable in the short run and for situations when the economic situation was marked by sticky wages, liquidity traps and interest-sensitive investment.³³ Neoclassical synthesizers like Paul Samuelson, Robert Solow, James Tobin, James Meade, J.R. Hicks and Franco Modigliani strived to fit Keynes’ insights into the neoclassical fold as well as to formalize them through econometrics.³⁴

Far from being a homogenous paradigm, neo-Keynesianism was a spectrum of ideas. The “right” of the spectrum stretched as far as the neo-Keynesians who embraced the so-called “Pigou effect,” which stated that the General Theory failed to specify a link from “real balances” to current consumption and that the inclusion of such a “wealth effect” would make the economy more “self-correcting” to the drops in aggregate demand (and therefore in employment) than Keynes predicted.³⁵ This entailed a decreased emphasis on using demand-side policies to achieve the Keynesian objective of full employment.

in the Federal Republic of Germany” in Hall, ed., *The Political Power of Economic Ideas*, 276–77. During this time, the central bank placed strict monetary limits on deficit spending and continued its epistemic hegemony by employing over 1,000 economists, in sharp contrast with the 200 economists on the payroll of the German finance ministry.

³² Alan Coddington, “Keynesian Economics: The Search for First Principles,” *Journal of Economic Literature* vol. 14, no. 1 (1976): 1258–73.

³³ The basic infrastructure of ideas used by Spanish neoclassical synthesizers was the Samuelson-Kaldor-Hicks formalization of Keynes’ thought. The intellectual manifesto of Keynesians as a group took place in a 1953 special issue of the economics review *De Economica* on Keynesianism’s applicability to the Spanish context.

³⁴ The basic formalization of the *General Theory* was achieved by John Hicks and Franco Modigliani in the infamous IS-LM model, a system of simultaneous equations meant to address short-run imperfections to achieve the long-run equilibria in all the markets of the economy expected by neoclassicals. IS/LM stands for Investment Saving / Liquidity preference Money supply. The IS-LM model allowed for the synthesis of the classical regime, where wages were assumed to be flexible and the Keynesian regime, where nominal wages were assumed to be relatively rigid (“sticky”).

³⁵ For a classical Keynesian critique of the Pigou effect see Michael Kalecki, “Professor Pigou on ‘The classical stationary state’: A comment,” *Economic Journal* vol. 54, no. 213 (1944): 131–32. Kalecki argued that the adjust-

On the “left” of the Keynesian spectrum were those who concluded that the “Pigou effect” had to work on a narrow band of assets and that even if this effect existed, its power could be empirically ignored. Another mark of left-leaning Keynesianism was Abba Lerner’s “functional finance” argument that balancing the budget is not important in itself, and should be managed accordingly. Governments could act to end high inflation without risking a major depression only by balancing monetary and fiscal intervention through incomes policy and a “functional finance” policy that ensures the adequate demand levels that guarantee full employment.³⁶ Similarly, the *income redistribution effect* of Michal Kalecki held that far from being stabilizing, the reduction in money wages in a situation of unemployment can lead to *reductions* in aggregate demand and thus *more* unemployment.³⁷ The logic behind this was that if wages decline, then the mark-up between prices and wages would increase. This would result in a redistribution of income from wage-earner to profit-earners. But if profit-earners have a lower propensity to consume than wage-earners, then the

ment required by the Pigou effect would increase catastrophically the real value of debts which, in turn, would cause wholesale bankruptcy and a “confidence crisis.”

³⁶ “What eventually became known as textbook Keynesian policies were in many ways Lerner’s interpretations of Keynes’s policies, especially those expounded in *The Economics of Control* (1944) and later in *The Economics of Employment* (1951). Textbook expositions of Keynesian policy naturally gravitated to the black and white ‘Lernerian’ policy of Functional Finance rather than the grayer Keynesian policies. Thus, the vision that monetary and fiscal policy should be used as a balance wheel, which forms a key element in the textbook policy revolution, deserves to be called Lernerian rather than Keynesian.” David Colander, “Was Keynes a Keynesian or a Lernerian?” *Journal of Economic Literature* vol. 22 (December 1984): 1573.

³⁷ This argument was further elaborated upon by Nicholas Kaldor, “Alternative Theories of Distribution,” *The Review of Economic Studies* vol. 23, no. 2 (1955–1956): 83–100, Joan Robinson, *Economic Philosophy* (London: C. A. Watts, 1962); Sindy Weintraub, *An Approach to the Theory of Income Distribution* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1958) and *A Keynesian Theory of Employment Growth and Income Distribution* (Philadelphia: Chilton 1965), Kenneth Boulding, *A Reconstruction of Economics* (New York: John Wiley, 1950); Frank Hahn, “The Share of Wages in the Trade Cycle,” *Economic Journal* vol. 60 (1950) and “The Share of Wages in the National Income,” *Oxford Economic Papers* vol. 3 (1951).

average marginal propensity to consume in the economy declines and thus aggregate demand declines. “Functional finance” ideas became textbook Keynesianism and the basis for policy during the Western postwar expansion.

Pushing Keynesianism even further to the left were French economists like Pierre Masse, who read in Keynes’ work an endorsement of the imperative of indicative planning,³⁸ Austro-Keynesians and the more rebellious, yet less policy relevant post-Keynesians.³⁹ But even though that Keynes was less favorable toward planning of all sorts in the *General Theory*, it certainly is the case that French indicative planners such as Masse cited Keynes as the father of indicative planning. This may have been an act of “radicalization” of Keynes’ work, but what it matters is that French planners reproduced Masse’s reading of Keynes and so did their Spanish counterparts.

Indicative planners argued that one of the functions of government should be the early identification of oversupply, bottlenecks and shortages so that state investment could be used on time and in concert with investors to preempt the occurrence of market disequilibria. By contrast with “standard” Keynesianism, Austro-Keynesians complemented counter-cyclical demand management with strong neocorporatist incomes and exchange rate policies. According to Austro-Keynesians,

economic policy tried to stabilize the data most important for entrepreneurial decisions, especially wage increase, exchange

³⁸ Estrin and Holmes saw indicative planning as an appropriate response to uncertainty based on Keynes’ 1926, *The End of Laissez-Faire* (1973, vol. IX). See Saul Estrin and P. Holmes, “Uncertainty, Efficiency and Economic Planning in Keynesian Economics,” *Journal of Post-Keynesian Economics* vol. 7, no. 4 (Summer 1985): 463–74. This view was disputed by Alan Coddington, *Keynesian Economics. The Search for First Principles* (London: Routledge, 1984). John Meade provided a more general discussion of indicative planning within a broader Keynesian context. See Meade’s *Theory of Indicative Planning* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1970).

³⁹ Inspired by Joan Robinson’s “Ely Lecture” at the AEA in 1971, Alfred Eichner, Jan Kregel and others organized what developed into the grouping known as Post Keynesian economics. See J. E. King, *A History of Post-Keynesian Economics since 1936* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc., 2003).

rates and investment promotion. This lightened the burden of the traditional instruments of stabilization policy. In addition these instruments were assigned differently: Exchange rate policy was primarily used to stabilize prices in the short run, incomes policy to equilibrate the current account in the medium and longer run, fiscal policy to stabilize employment.”⁴⁰

These intellectual innovations shaped different varieties of social democratic experiments in Western Europe. The Austrians and the British had more nationalized property than the Swedes, yet they all avoided making the state the competitor of private capital. Instead, through a combination of anti-cyclical macroeconomic policies, provision of public goods, and welfare measures, social democrats provided private capital with the economic inputs and the social peace needed for sustained economic profitability and maintenance of the capitalist production and investment regime. In other words, Keynesianism saved both capitalism and social democracy through a win-win game between capital, labor and the state. As Przeworski put it:

The essence of contemporary social democracy is the conviction that the market can be directed to those allocations of any good, public or private, that are preferred by citizens and that by gradually rationalizing the economy the state can turn capitalists into private functionaries of the public without altering the juridical status of private property.⁴¹

Yet just as Przeworski was writing this in 1979, it was clear that mainstream macroeconomics began to “de-Keynesianize” and cede more and more points to neoclassical orthodoxy. Some leading Keynesian economists put up a fight. Speaking from his position as president of the American Economic Association in 1977, Franco Modigliani attacked the monetarist insurgency and defended countercyclical monetary and fiscal management policies as the adequate response to stagfla-

⁴⁰ See Gunther Tichy, “Strategy and Implementation of Employment Policy in Austria. Successful Experiments with Unconventional Assignment of Instruments to Goals,” *Kyklos* vol. 37, no.3 (August 1984): 363–386.

⁴¹ Przeworski, *Capitalism*, 40.

tion by arguing that the inflation of the 1970s was mostly the result of the oil shock of 1973, rather than the result of flawed government policies.⁴² He argued that expansionary fiscal policies could either complement or offset monetary policy in the pursuit of either unemployment or anti-inflationary objectives. A few Keynesian macroeconomists set out to demonstrate that the embarrassing difficulty to predict stagflation could be overcome by incorporating exogenous supply shocks in the standard structural models based on the Phillips curve.

Other prominent neo-Keynesians, however, began to make major concessions or simply defected. In 1980, prominent Keynesian James Tobin, a scholar who defended a reflationary response to the crisis, ended up agreeing that “the price- and wage-setting institutions of the economy have an inflationary bias. Consequently, demand management cannot stabilize the price trend without chronic sacrifice of output and employment unless assisted, occasionally.”⁴³ Around the same time, Assar Lindbeck, the dominant figure of Scandinavian Keynesianism, began to accept the basic assumptions of monetarism and rational expectations, leading to a paradigmatic shift to the right in the economics of the flagship of social-democracy.⁴⁴ In less than a decade, Keynesianism went from epistemic hegemony into the defensive.

INTEGRATION: THE THIRD WAY AND NEOLIBERALISM (1982–)

This “third way”⁴⁵ between classical social democracy and the “pure and simple” neoliberalism of the Reagan-Thatcher era arrived in Europe almost two decades before Tony Blair, Gerhard Schröder, Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck popularized the concept. The

⁴² Franco Modigliani, “The Monetarist Controversy or, Should We Forsake Stabilization Policies?” *American Economic Review* vol. 67, no. 2 (1977): 1–19.

⁴³ James Tobin, “Stabilization Policy Ten Years After,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* vol. 1 (1980): 64.

⁴⁴ Mark Blyth, “The Transformation of the Swedish Model: Economic Ideas, Distributional Conflict, and Institutional Change,” *World Politics* vol. 54 (October 2001): 16.

⁴⁵ See Alex Callinicos, *Against the Third Way: An Anti-Capitalist* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

term had some history. Alex Callinicos reminds us, the term “third way” was used by Labour in 1912 to define a middle point between syndicalism and socialism and by the New Left to define an alternative between communism and social democracy. During the 1990s, however, in what amounted to an integration of the social democratic legacy into the redefined priorities of the market, during the 1980s social democrats felt compelled to withdraw the promise of full employment promise and bought the supply-side argument that the deregulation of the labor market could ensure realistically low unemployment levels instead. Rather than direct state guarantees of economic rights and welfare universalism, one talked instead about investment in “human capital,” active labor market policies, the “social investment state” and the fair distribution of opportunities through education and health rather than of income through tax and benefit systems.⁴⁶

But whether we see the Third Way as ‘[t]he best ideological shell of neoliberalism today,’ as Perry Anderson put it, or rather as the only politically and economically feasible manifestation of progressive politics, as Anthony Giddens insists, it is clear that at the core of the Third Way lies the rejection of Keynesianism and the embrace of the main pillars of a resurgent neoclassical orthodoxy. This ideological transformation allows for varieties of capitalism and welfare states as different as those of Britain and Sweden.⁴⁷ However, throughout European social democracy during the late 1980s, one encountered similar

⁴⁶ See Tony Blair, *The Third Way* (London: Fabian Society, 1998); Gordon Brown, “Equality—Then and Now” in D. Leonard, ed., *Crosland and New Labour* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way* (London: Polity Press, 1998); M. Powell, ed., *New Labour, New Welfare State?* (Bristol: Policy Press, 1999); Stuart White “Interpreting the ‘Third Way’,” *Renewal* vol. 6, no. 1 (1998): 17–30. For synthetic analyses see Martin Powell, “New Labour and the Third Way in the British Welfare State: A New and Distinctive Approach,” *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2000): 39–60; Jelle Visser “From Keynesianism to the Third Way: Labour Relations and Social Policy in Postwar Western Europe,” *Economic and Industrial Democracy* vol. 21, no. 4 (2000): 421–56.

⁴⁷ Giddens himself talks about several varieties of the Third Way in Europe: the “market-oriented” in Britain, the “market and consensus-oriented” in the Netherlands, the “reformed welfare state” in Scandinavia and the “state-led way” in France.

levels of commitment to macroeconomic orthodoxy and labor market flexibility. It is to the intellectual origins of this transformation that I now turn.

The Neoliberal Counterrevolution in Economics

At the heart of classic democracy was a twin contention. First, Keynesians posited that full employment would not necessarily lead to a higher and constant rate of inflation. The wage-price spiral would lead to such an outcome that monetary policy alone could control inflation. Inflation was commonly believed to be driven primarily by factors other than monetary policy: fiscal deficits, commodity price shocks, inflation psychology, aggressive labor unions, or monopolistically competitive firms.⁴⁸ The second contention was that demand-side expansionary policies did not squeeze profits while they kick-started consumption.

During the 1970s both these propositions came under attack. Monetarists economists attacked the first thesis by making the twin contention, that an excessive supply in the quantity of money by the central bank is the most important cause of inflation, and that the vagaries of monetary policy are responsible for the cyclical fluctuations of the economy.⁴⁹ This controversial argument, that did away with neo-Keynesians' complex accounts of the causes of inflation, was built on the classical assumption that governments may not know in advance what the real effects of monetary policy will be in the long term. Monetarism rose as an anti-Keynesian restatement of the eighteenth century classical quantity of money theory. This empha-

⁴⁸ Even the head of the Federal Reserve from 1970 to 1978, Arthur Burns, shared this view. See R. B. Burns, *The Self-Concept Theory in Measurement, Development and Behavior* (New York: Longman, 1979) and Robert L. Hetzel, "Arthur Burns and Inflation," *Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Economic Quarterly* vol. 84, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 21–44.

⁴⁹ The tenets of classic monetarism were laid out in a string of Milton Friedman classics: *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), *Studies in the Quantity Theory of Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), *A Program for Monetary Stability* (New York: Fordhman University Press, 1960).

sized the stability of the private sector and the insufficiency of monetary policy in controlling inflation, and it was built on the classic liberal faith that, in the long run, markets are more efficient and productive than government intervention.⁵⁰ According to its “father”, Milton Friedman, to forestall either deflation or inflation, the most important goal of the monetary policy should be a public commitment by the government to lock in low fixed rates of growth in the money supply (between 3 and 5 percent) plus all commercial bank deposits.⁵¹ Once accepted, this thesis eviscerated Keynesian countercyclical policies based on forecasting the rise in demand. It promoted the institutionalization of monetary targets via open market operations, changes in interest rates, budgetary spending cuts or quantitative controls of the increase in bank credit, all with a view to reduce the effective demand for goods and services. The key policy implication of the monetarist thesis was that government should keep the money supply steady and expand it slightly each year in accordance with the natural rate of economic growth. In practice, this meant that central banks should establish binding inflation targets. If they did this, monetarists claimed, the normal market process would keep inflation and unemployment low, while avoiding the risk of recession.⁵²

⁵⁰ For the pre-history of modern monetarism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Robert Leeson, *The Anti-Keynesian Tradition (Archival Insights Into the Evolution of Economics)* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

⁵¹ This policy was adopted by the US Fed on October 6, 1979 by lowering and steadying the growth in the money supply. This was achieved by varying the reserves available to the banking system through open-market operations.

⁵² See Charles P. Kindleberger, *Keynesianism vs. Monetarism, and Other Essays in Financial History* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2006). While Keynesians endorsed a complex mix of monetary and financial policies to forestall the formation of bubbles, modern monetarists prescribed the same simple money supply growth rule enforced by a strong central bank (David Laidler, “The Case for Price Stability, Then and Now: A Retrospective Note on John W. Crow’s 1988 Eric J. Hanson Memorial Lecture” [University of Western Ontario, Economic Policy Research Institute Working Papers, 2008], 66). These ideas gained more respectability once Edmund Phelps, *Golden Rules of Economic Growth: Studies of Efficient and Optimal Investment* (New York: Norton 1967) and colleagues (Edmund Phelps et al., *Microeconomic*

But the monetarists' offensive did not end with monetary policy. They attacked government employment regulations by cutting the links between monetary policy and the dynamics of unemployment. Friedman postulated that there is a natural rate of unemployment whose levels can only be kept low artificially, through labor market rigidities (labor unions, minimum wage legislation, hire and fire costs). According to his theory, the natural rate of unemployment is unknowable. Therefore, the government's attempts to lower it are doomed to generate either inflationary spirals if unemployment is set below the natural rate, or deflation if it is set above this rate. The most important implication of this argument is that there is no permanent trade-off between inflation and unemployment; there is only a temporary trade-off.

During the 1970s, the monetarist onslaught against Keynesianism was complemented by two new schools of thought: supply-side and new classical economics. Supply-side economics was the product of interactions between conservative media and a small group of maverick economists. It resuscitated the classical liberal thesis that supply creates its own demand (Say's law),⁵³ leading supply-siders to reject the possibility that economic recessions may be caused by a fall in demand.⁵⁴

But, as Mark Blyth showed,⁵⁵ supply-siders went beyond this classical thesis in two respects. First, they argued that pumping up demand would simply lead to higher inflation, if it were not done in conjunc-

Foundations of Employment and Inflation Theory (New York: Norton 1970) showed how Friedman's findings could be derived using better specified models, in which information was imperfect and agents made mistakes. Also see Thomas Mayer, "Consumption in the Great Depression," *Journal of Political Economy* vol. 86, no. 1 (February 1978): 139–45; David Laidler, "Some Policy Implications of the Monetary Approach to Balance of Payments and Exchange Rate Analysis," *Oxford Economic Papers* vol. 33 (July 1981): 70–84; Kevin D. Hoover, "Two Types of Monetarism," *Journal of Economic Literature* vol. 22, no. 1 (March, 1984): 58–76.

⁵³ The best-known supply-side economists were Arthur Laffer, Jude Wanniski, Paul Craig Roberts, Alan Reynolds, Karl Brunner and Robert Bartley. Some have degrees in economics but none have a strong record on scholarly work.

⁵⁴ See Jude Wanniski, *The Way the World Works* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1978) or Victor Canto et al., *Foundations of Supply-Side Economics: Theory and Evidence* (New York: Academic Press, 1983).

⁵⁵ Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations. Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

tion with the improvement of markets through deregulation, liberalization, privatization or free trade. Given the assumption that unemployment is voluntary, the second monetarist intellectual contribution was that government policy may increase the labor supply (and thus both productivity and investment) by allowing participants in the labor market to keep more of their money (through tax cuts), and to more freely enter and exit the labor market (by scrapping minimum wage legislation and the deregulation of labor legislation).⁵⁶

Second, in addition to tax cuts and labor deregulation, supply-side ideas also entailed reductions in welfare benefits. This was not based on the monetarist idea that welfare spending can be inflationary, but on the supply-side discovery that labor supply decreases when the unemployed are offered benefits that give them incentives not to work. In their strong forms, supply-side ideas argued that tax cuts would generate such revenue growth that the resulting deficit would be completely financed by the cuts themselves (the Laffer curve) and would raise living standards to such a degree that welfare spending would be unnecessary. Supply-siders cited no evidence for such theses. The fact that welfare state scholarship did not engage with quantitative research on the “big welfare-reduced growth” thesis until the mid 1980s kept the supply-side argument sheltered from robust attacks precisely at a time when social democrats began to doubt their commitment to the welfare state.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The concern with the efficiency losses generated by taxation was first articulated in the postwar years by Arnold Harberger’s *Taxation and Welfare* (Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1974). Working with the classical assumption that the added value created by growth trickled down in the form of employment-generating investment, the supply-siders emphasized that the tax cuts should be directed principally at high marginal income tax rates, a move to be conducted in conjunction with broadening the tax base (coded language for increasing taxation on a wider range of goods and services).

⁵⁷ Significantly, welfare state scholars found the supply-side argument devoid of empirical value. Both Walter Korpi, “Economic Growth and the Welfare State: Leaky Bucket or Irrigation System,” *European Sociological Review* vol. 1, no. 2 (September, 1985): 97–118 and Robert Friedland and Jimmy Sanders, “The Public Economy and Economic Growth in Western Market Economies,” *American Sociological Review* vol. 50 (1985): 421–37 found that welfare states have a positive effect on growth rates. After disaggregating expenditure categories, Saunders (1985–1986) found that social transfers have a positive effect on growth, just as the Keynesian paradigm maintained.

Finally, by importing microeconomic ideas into macroeconomics, monetarists also argued that regulation created perverse incentives and distorted resource allocation as much as it cured other problems. Because supply-siders assumed that efficiency was possible only in conditions of private ownership of assets and competitive markets, deregulation and privatization emerged as key policy recommendations.

According to the more academically-anchored new classical (or rational expectations) approach, real-world business fluctuations could not be explained away as market failures (the Keynesian approach), or strictly as the result of monetary disturbances (the monetarist foil). Instead, Robert Lucas, Thomas Sargent, Neil Wallace and other prominent representatives of this new tradition also stressed the causal role of supply-side shocks, such as technological revolutions, raw materials price spikes and radical changes in the organization of production. Employment, like output, would rise with favorable shocks and fall with unfavorable shocks.⁵⁸

The new classicals argued that these disturbances could not be remedied by the government. On the contrary, echoing the earlier critiques of government intervention made by the Austrian School, they argued that interference could only worsen them. Where Friedman had argued that policy was destabilizing, Lucas and his colleagues used complex mathematical models to demonstrate that, if private agents were completely rational and if markets were competitive (two assumptions shared by the neo-Keynesian mainstream) it would be *impossible* for the government to stabilize the economy, simply because agents would adjust their inflationary expectations and “outsmart” the government. To make this argument, new classicals adopted John Muth’s rational expectations hypothesis: if the predictions of an economic model were correct and the agents’ expectations of the future were

⁵⁸ For two key general accounts of new classical economics see Kevin D. Hoover, *The New Classical Macroeconomics: A Skeptical Inquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and Steven M. Sheffrin, *Rational Expectations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For more detailed descriptions and evaluations see J.E. Hartley, K.D. Hoover, and K.D. Salyer, *Real Business Cycles. A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998) and Robert E. Lucas and Thomas J. Sargent, *Rational Expectations and Econometric Practice* (London: Allen and Unwin, London, 1981).

wrong, then the agents could use the model to remedy their expectations and avoid future errors. They applied this argument to a critique of the Keynesian assertion that there was a trade-off between unemployment and inflation, and they maintained that an expansion of the aggregate demand could lower unemployment only because the acceleration in prices was not anticipated. The companies that mistook higher market prices for higher real returns would be willing to increase output, while workers who mistook higher market wages for higher purchasing power would be willing to terminate their unemployment sooner. Yet these outcomes would not last, because neither the returns to firms nor the purchasing power of workers were really higher when adjusted to inflation. As soon as they realized that expansionary policy is not a stimulus to the economy, but is actually an early warning inflation, firms and workers would reduce production and increase the unemployment rate. What is more, having made the mistake once, they would not be easily fooled again by the same policy, thus depriving state intervention of the capacity to reach its goals in the long run. Consequently, the government's only policy option was to credibly commit itself to anti-inflationary policies, whose costs in terms of higher unemployment could be addressed by boosting the supply-side of the economy through tax cuts and labor market deregulation.

The radical attack against government intervention, which was instigated by rational expectations, was further strengthened during the 1970s by the indigenization of public choice theory in macroeconomics.⁵⁹ William Nordhaus' work on the political business cycle,⁶⁰ for example, legitimated the assumption that bureaucrats and politicians were not seeking to optimize a national welfare function, as Keynesians had assumed, but rather were motivated by their own strategic interests. Public policy, therefore, was riddled with inefficient rent seeking. The most important policy implication was that governments should

⁵⁹ Public choice theory dates back to the work of James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, Mancur Olsen, and Anthony Downs around 1960. For a systematic overview see S.M. Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ William D. Nordhaus, "The Political Business Cycle," *Review of Economic Studies* vol. 42, no. 2 (April 1975): 169–90.

delegate monetary policy to an independent central bank, whose vested interest (ensuring price stability) was by hypothesis a virtuous one. Other public choice economists⁶¹ went further in attacking a basic social-democratic thesis by trying to demonstrate that welfare states harm growth in the long term due to rent seeking. However, as some reviewers noted, they “employed proxy variables for sclerosis (age of a nation or years of democracy) that assumed a fair amount of faith.”⁶²

Neoliberalism and Policy Practice

Beginning with the mid 1970s, the neoliberal insurgency began to percolate in international organizations as well as in the political system of the advanced capitalist core. The embrace of these ideas by actors with influence in the world economy gave them a greater weight relative to available alternatives such as, say, post-Keynesian or Austrian economics, because they provided policy makers puzzled by enduring stagflation with concrete and successful examples. As neoliberal ideas were adopted by the European Commission, OECD, the IMF and great economic powers, the pressures to adjust to the new reality increased on nation state elites elsewhere. Yet the endorsement of the neoliberal agenda did not reach a critical mass of center-left West European parties until the second half of the 1980s, well after PSOE decided its government program in 1982.

At the systemic level of analysis, the IMF’s tolerance of Keynesian demand management began to weaken just as the Bretton Woods system showed its first signs of crisis. As a recent study of IMF policy papers shows, during the late 1960s “a form of ‘monetarism’ was emerging in the counsels of the IMF, which involved not only a focus on monetary aggregates, but, perhaps even more importantly, a skepticism about governmental discretion in the conduct of economic policy

⁶¹ See Kwang Choi, “A Statistical Test of Olson’s Model,” In D.C. Mueller, ed., *The Political Economy of Growth* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1983), 57–78.

⁶² Gøsta Esping-Andersen and Kees van Kersbergen, “Contemporary Research on Social Democracy,” *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 18 (1992): 199.

and an enthusiasm for fixed, quantitative targets.”⁶³ But it was not until the mid 1970s that the neoliberal turn became evident. Scholars attribute this turn to the fact that key policymakers in United States⁶⁴ began to push the IMF to embrace select neoliberal ideas such as conditional financing and financial deregulation. According to Eric Helleiner, Treasury Department Secretary Simon and Federal Reserve Chairman Burns and secretary of state William P. Rogers used their institutions’ influence in the IMF to force Britain in a macroeconomic stabilization package that contained crucial financial deregulation reforms.⁶⁵

Simultaneously, monetarist arguments began to gain traction in the British and American financial press and central banks at a time when financial markets became increasingly hostile to the Labor government’s adoption of a neo-Keynesian crisis package in 1974.⁶⁶ And since Britain was more vulnerable to financial interests than any other European country, she became the trial run of neoliberalism in 1976, when an IMF macroeconomic austerity package with financial deregulation clauses was forced on a British government trying to fight the collapse of the sterling. Historical contingency entered the scene in dramatic fashion, as the left faction of the Labor party was one vote away from rejecting the IMF package.⁶⁷ Neoliberal ideas, thus, scored

⁶³ Ben Clift and Jim Tomlinson, “Negotiating credibility: Britain and the International Monetary Fund, 1956–1976,” *Contemporary European History* vol. 17, no. 4 (November 2008): 565.

⁶⁴ See Eric Helleiner, *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance: From Bretton Woods to the 1990s* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 124–30. The matter appears to have been highly “securitized,” as National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft quotes saying “I spent more time on this matter [Britain’s financial crisis] during those weeks as anything else. It was considered by us to be the single greatest threat to the Western world” (Helleiner, *Idem*, 128–29).

⁶⁵ See James Raymond Vreeland, *The IMF and Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2003) and Mark D. Harmon, *The British Labour Government and the 1976 IMF Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

⁶⁶ See Blyth, *Great Transformations*; Helleiner, *Global Finance*; Douglas Wass, *Decline to Fall* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Colin Hay, ed., *New Directions in Political Science* (London: Palgrave, 2010).

⁶⁷ Kevin Hickson, *The IMF Crisis of 1976 and British Politics* (London: Tauris, 2005) and Wass, *Decline to Fall*.

their first victory at a critical juncture of European economic history. Testifying to the importance of this moment, US state Secretary William P. Rogers suggestively framed this moment as

a choice between Britain remaining in the liberal financial system of the West as opposed to a radical change of course, because we were concerned about Tony Benn precipitating a policy decision by Britain to turn its back on the IMF. I think if that had happened, the whole system would have come apart...So we tended to see it in cosmic terms.”⁶⁸

Following the British crisis, the IMF further enlarged the list of policy areas subject to its newly acquired neoliberal sensibility. Broome and Seabrooke’s systematic analysis of IMF policy documents concerning Western capitalist states evidenced that the Fund expanded its advisory jurisdiction over the tax regime, labor regulations, welfare state and industrial policy issues during the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, in 1977, the Fund advised Denmark not only to cut its growing current account, which was part of its old neoclassical orthodoxy, but also to adopt neoliberal supply-side measures such as the raising of indirect taxation and the lowering of income taxes. Also, in 1981 the Fund basically told Sweden to shrink the welfare state, cut industrial subsidies, cut income taxes and control wage increases.⁶⁹ After 1981, a similarly expanded package was served to developing countries.⁷⁰ After the Latin American debt crisis in 1981, IMF policy advice went beyond deflationary, fiscal adjustment, wage restraint and revenue-increasing policy suggestions and began to advocate for more

⁶⁸ See Helleiner, *Idem*, 128.

⁶⁹ André Broome and Leonard Seabrooke, “Seeing Like the IMF: Institutional Change in Small Open Economies,” *Review of International Political Economy* vol. 14, no. 4 (2007): 592–93.

⁷⁰ See Jacques J. Polak, “The Role of the Fund in Federal Reserve Bank in Boston,” *The International Monetary System Forty Years After Bretton Woods* (Boston: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 1984), 245–66 and Thomas Bierstecker, “The Triumph of Neoclassical Economics in the Developing World,” in James Roseneau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, eds., *Governance without Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 102–32.

structural measures, such as privatization (public enterprise sales, sub-contracting or eliminating public sector services), labor market deregulation, tax incentives for private sector development, market restoring mechanisms (ending subsidies, interest rate increases and wage indexation, trade and payment liberalization).

The OECD followed a similar line in near-synchrony with the IMF. After 1977, OECD reports written for the EEC advocated a standard monetarist line plus an emphasis on fixed exchange rates. The most important of these was the McCracken report (1977), whose call for austerity policies to address the stagflation crisis was couched not only in the new set of neoliberal ideas discussed above, but also in new political, sociological and psychological narratives about the “wealth paradox” that bolstered those ideas. These narratives used unexamined conservative values and assumptions to intimate that implied social-democracy and welfare systems were dead-enders, that government interventions are doomed by intrinsic inefficiencies and that high levels of long term unemployment were acceptable in the name of cementing incentives to invest. In the analytical framework of this influential report, the state-as-investor disappears, yet the “new” state is now the “minimal” state of the orthodox neoliberal line. In addition to the neoliberal disciplinarian function (through credible commitments to price stability), the state was expected to continue to facilitate social consensus through engineering wage and price level agreements with labor and capital, rather than act as the public arm of private capital.⁷¹

In Western Europe, the neoliberal revolution arrived first in the European Commission and in Germany. In 1973, even before the first oil shock hit, EEC’s Council of Ministers passed a resolution that in effect represented the first official endorsement of the monetarist theses. The resolution called on member states to “progres-

⁷¹ See Richard O. Keohane, “Economics, Inflation, and the Role of the State: Political Implications of the McCracken Report,” *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* vol. 31, no. 1 (1978): 119–25. Also see Kathleen R. McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas: Monetary Politics in the European Union* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). OECD reports also began to attack generous welfare benefits and labor market regulations, rather than insufficient demand, as the cause of persisting high unemployment (OECD 1989; 1994).

sively reduce the growth rate of the money supply until it equals that of the real GNP.”⁷² Subsequently, the Commission’s finance “ministry” (the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs) issued a report in 1975 that recommended monetary supply targets to lower inflationary expectations and create the foundations for a new fixed exchange rate regime. Known as the OPTICA reports (OPTimum Currency Area), these policy papers took issue with the then still reigning neo-Keynesian orthodoxy and turned low inflation and fixed exchange rates into top priorities of economic policy at the supranational level in Europe.⁷³ During the second half of the 1970s, German-style inflation targeting also became the new orthodoxy in the EEC’s Committee of Central Bank Governors, a platform for policy coordination for central bankers).⁷⁴

The German policy success in weathering the stagflation crisis inspired other West European governments to do the same.⁷⁵ As early as 1976, conservative governments in France and Italy also shifted from expansionary measures to reform plans centered around restrictive monetary policy through the adoption of inflation targets, currency stabilization, wage restraint and rejection of the notion of full employment. In so doing, they expressly modeled their restrictive policy packages on *Modell Deutschland*.⁷⁶ The center-left governments of the Benelux had “shadowed” Germany’s anti-inflation posture throughout the late 70s by pegging their currencies to the deutsche mark while defending deficit-financed countercyclical spending, corporatism and the welfare state. Yet when Belgian and Dutch conservatives won the

⁷² Ben S. Bernanke et. al., *Inflation Targeting: Lessons from the International Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 44–45.

⁷³ See Niels Thygesen, “Inflation and exchange rates,” *Journal of International Economics* vol. 8 (May 1978): 301–18. Like American monetarists and rational expectations economists, the OPTICA experts also saw much futility in government interventions in wage and price formation and urged member states to adopt the inflation targeting monetary regime pioneered by Germany in December 1974.

⁷⁴ McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas*, 157–58 and Niels Thygesen, “The European Monetary System: Precursors, First Steps, and Policy Options,” *Bulletin de la Banque Nationale Belgique* vol. 54 (1979): 57–125.

⁷⁵ McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas*, 129–40.

⁷⁶ McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas*.

elections in 1982 and 1983 respectively, they not only maintained the D-mark peg, but also embarked on deflationary policies that suspended wage indexation, froze benefits, institutionalized work share agreements and deregulated part-time work.⁷⁷

In 1981-1982, neoliberal ideas were being embraced by most West European conservative parties, who thus were reneging on their participation in the grand postwar socio-economic compromise. But as far as the center-left was concerned, even “pragmatic” neoliberalism was far from cannibalizing the economic policy identity of a critical mass of European social-democratic parties then in government or opposition. Rather than a generalized neoliberal swing, in the late 1970s and early 1980s the West European center-left offered instead a mosaic of reactions: outright resistance to neoliberalism (British Labor Party, Belgian Socialists, Dutch, Austrian and Danish social-democrats), resistance followed by accommodation (French Socialists), and early accommodation (Italian socialists, Swedish and German social-democrats). It is to the analysis of the expected effects of this mosaic for PSOE that I now turn.

After the Fact: The End of Leninism and the End of Classical Social Democracy

During the 1980s neoliberal ideas began to enter the economic policy conventions of social-democratic parties. If the German social democrats had shifted away from Keynesianism in the mid 1970s, the rest of the continent waited until 1982, a year that marked the abandonment of Keynesianism by the Swedish and the Spanish center-left.

The case of the “pragmatic” neoliberalism pursued by German social democrats is well known,⁷⁸ and the same rightward turn was

⁷⁷ Jelle Visser and Anton Hemerijck, *A Dutch Miracle: Job Growth, Welfare Reform and Corporatism in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997) and “Change and Immobility—Three Decades of Policy Adjustment in Netherlands and Belgium,” *West European Politics* vol. 23, no. 2 (2000): 229–56; Jens Bastian, *A Matter of Time: From Work Sharing to Temporal Flexibility in Belgium, France and Britain* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994).

⁷⁸ See Fritz M. Scharpf, *Sozialdemokratische Krisenpolitik in Europa* (Frankfurt a. Main/ New York: Campus, 1987), 192 and Jens Borchert, *Die conserva-*

observed in Swedish social democracy, albeit much later than in Germany. As suggested earlier, after 1974, German social-democrats pioneered inflation targeting and convinced other European governments to do the same. But by 1980, the second oil shock and strict monetary policy contributed to a rise in unemployment. To ameliorate worsening job market figures, the SPD pushed for increased government supply-side spending on infrastructure projects. To finance them, the SPD proposed a “third way” policy mix: tax increases and cuts in welfare benefits. This policy position led to the collapse of SPD’s alliance with the liberals and then to the conservative victory of 1982.

In Europe the rejection of Keynesianism began during the mid 1970s. The monetarist policy regime had already had a trial run in Germany’s social democratic government beginning with 1974.⁷⁹ While monetarist policies had been tried during the postwar years by the Netherlands and Belgium,⁸⁰ the fact that Keynesian policies were associated with higher growth rates in France, Austria, Scandinavia or Italy weakened the case for its diffusion outside Germany and the small group of states that “shadowed” its macroeconomic policy.

This time it was different, however. Germany’s generous welfare state, employment figures and wage levels appeared to weather stagflation better than countries that pushed ambitious demand-side policies during the second half of the 1970s. West Germany’s constitutionally-guaranteed commitment to price stability ensured through an independent central bank had been a mainstay of this country’s monetary

tive Transformation des Wohlfahrtsstaates. Grossbritannien, Kanada, die USA und Deutschland im Vergleich (Frankfurt: Campus, 1995). After the party entered opposition, its programmatic renewal efforts took it into an increasingly market-conforming direction, with anti-inflationary policies, skepticism towards reflation and welfare state cuts to boot. See Stephen Padgett, “The West German Social Democrats in Opposition 1982–86,” *West European Politics* vol. 10, no. 3 (1987): 333–56.

⁷⁹ Fritz W. Scharpf, “Economic and Institutional Constraints of Full-Employment Strategies: Sweden, Austria, and West Germany” in John Goldtrope ed., *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism. Studies in the Political Economy of Western European Nations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 90–104 and McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas*.

⁸⁰ Paulette Kurzer, *Business and Banking: Political Change and Economic Integration in Western Europe* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 163 and 228.

policy during the postwar years.⁸¹ Yet it was only in December 1974 that the central bank resorted to monetarist inflation targeting, or the use of pre-announced low growth targets (around 2 percent a year) for the money stock (M3) with the intent of lowering the public's inflation expectations.

This policy move was enabled by the fact that the collapse of Bretton Woods relieved the Bundesbank of its most important external obligation (i.e. to intervene in the foreign exchange markets), yet the choice for a more rightward option was based in explicit monetarist arguments (Issing 1992; 1996). As a former Bundesbank official argued,

[t]he choice of a monetary target in 1974 undoubtedly signaled a fundamental regime shift. Not only was it a clear break with the past but also a decision to discard alternative approaches to monetary policy. There were two main arguments in favor of providing a quantified guidepost for the future rate of monetary expansion. First, and foremost, was the intention of controlling inflation through the control of monetary expansion. Second, the Bundesbank tried to provide a guidance of agents' (especially wage bargainers') expectations through the announcement of a quantified objective for monetary growth. Therefore, with its new strategy, the Bundesbank clearly signaled its responsibility for the control of inflation.⁸²

⁸¹ Karl Kaltenthaler, "Institutional Sources of German Monetary Policy Dynamics," *Journal of Public Policy* vol. 17, no. 3 (2008): 269–97; Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, "Monetary Policy in Germany since 1948: National Tradition, International Best Practice or Ideology?" in Jean-Philippe Touffut, ed., *Central Banks as Economic Institutions* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2008), 22–51; Monica Prasad, *The Politics of Free Markets: The Rise of Neoliberal Economic Policies in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁸² See Otmar Issing. "Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of the Deutsche Bundesbank's Monetary Targeting," *Intereconomics* vol. 27 (1992): 289–300 and "Is Monetary Targeting in Germany Still Adequate?" in Horst Siebert (ed.), *Monetary Policy in an Integrated World Economy Symposium* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996). Although the targets were not met until 1979, Germany reduced inflation from 6 percent in 1975 to 2.7 percent in 1978, while not experiencing the stagflation drama of other advanced capitalist economies (Bernanke et al. 2005: 43–54). In Otmar Issing, "Why Did the

Yet Germany-style monetarism that was soon to be emulated across Western Europe was of a hybrid or “pragmatic” rather than of an ironclad or doctrinaire kind. In Germany not even the conservative *Bundesbank* economists wished to conceive of inflation targeting the first step in taking Germany’s embedded liberalism apart.⁸³ Theirs was a “pragmatic monetarism” that acknowledged the limits of price stability for employment and economic growth outcomes, while allowing for moderate and temporary accelerations of money growth to stimulate real growth and employment.⁸⁴ The central bank liked not only *Modell Deutschland*’s liberalized cross-border capital movements and deregulated domestic bank interest rates. It also valued its privilege to coin Europe’s anchor currency, while cultivating an institutionalized skepticism towards financial innovations.⁸⁵

Yet the embrace of monetarism by the SPD was not too striking given that Keynesianism had never been a hegemonic policy para-

Great Inflation Not Happen in Germany?” *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* (March/April), Part 2, 2005.

⁸³ Milton Friedman’s idea that monetary policy should be consigned to fighting inflation found little support in the Deutschebank and its admirers throughout Europe. See Ben S. Bernanke and Frederic S. Mishkin, “Inflation Targeting: A New Framework for Monetary Policy?,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* vol. 11, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 105. Moreover, inflation targeting as actually practiced by West European central bankers contained a considerable degree of policy discretion to allow responses to unemployment conditions, exchange rates and other short-term conditions (See Bernanke and Mishkin, *Idem*, 106).

⁸⁴ Bernanke et. al., *Inflation Targeting*, 51; Otmar Issing, “Monetary Targeting in Germany: The Stability of Monetary Policy and of the Monetary System,” *Journal of Monetary Economics* vol. 39, no. 1 (1997): 72; McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas*; Hans-Helmut Kotz, “Bank of England: A View from Frankfurt,” *Intereconomics* vol. 42, no. 6 (2007): 317–21; Manfred J. M. Neumann, “Pre-Commitment and Guidance Lessons from the Bundesbank’s History” a paper presented at the ECB colloquium *Monetary Policy: A Journey from Theory to Practice* (2006).

⁸⁵ Otmar Issing, “Stability of Monetary Policy, Stability of the Monetary System: Experience with Monetary Targeting in Germany,” *Deutsche Bundesbank: Auszüge aus Presseartikeln* vol. 22 (1995): 4–9; Kozo Yamamura and Wolfgang Streeck eds., *The Origins of Nonliberal Capitalism: Germany and Japan in Comparison* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001) and *The End of Diversity? Prospects for German and Japanese Capitalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

digm in Germany. By contrast, the rightward shift of the Swedish SAP came as a real surprise as the Swedes had been the beacon of the world center-left since the late 1930s. Thus, in 1982 the SAP's right wing made the rest of the party accept the argument that cutting inflation was a primary policy objective. SAP's "third way" entailed increasing profit levels to increase investment at the cost of wage stagnation. As a result, budget cuts, deficit cuts, investment incentives and a weakening of social democratic-union ties became mainstream SAP policies. Erstwhile advocates of "overcoming" capitalism began to reproduce classical liberal theses such as the "crowding out" effect of public investment or the reduction of demand side policies to cost competition measures that would increase the consumption of Swedish goods. By the mid 1980s, SAP went as far as carrying out financial deregulation and advocated tax cuts on top marginal rates.⁸⁶

Similarly, the Spanish Socialists officially abandoned Keynesianism in the same year. When Spanish Socialists entered government in December 1982, they faced an economy affected by recession, inflation and high unemployment. To deal with these challenges they adopted the same policies embraced by conservative governments in the United Kingdom and the United States. Fiscal austerity replaced efforts to reflate the economy, inflation priorities were no longer balanced with concerns with unemployment figures, loss-making state firms were privatized and a deregulatory drive was unleashed on both the labor market and financial services. Most surprisingly, no other West European left-of-center party adopted such

⁸⁶ Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations*, 223–28; Sven Steinmo, *Taxation and Democracy: Swedish, British, and American Approaches to Financing the Modern State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Nancy Fraser, "Social Movements versus Disciplinary Bureaucracies: The Discourses of Social Needs," in *CHS Papers* vol. 8. (Center for Humanistic Studies, University of Minnesota, 1987), 1–37; Peter Englund, "Financial deregulation in Sweden," *European Economic Review* vol. 34, no. 2 (1990): 385–93; Lars Jonung, Jaakko Kiander, and Pentti Vartia (eds.), *The Great Financial Crisis in Finland and Sweden: The Nordic Experience of Financial Liberalization* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishers, 2009); Hans Sjögren, and Miki Kishida, "Has the Control-Oriented Industrial Finance system Faded Away? A Comparative Analysis of Japan and Sweden," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* vol. 57 (2009): 156–71.

a comprehensive neoliberal reform package as early as 1982, with most European socialists and social-democrats opposing even modest deflationary programs until after the Spanish socialists made this shift. Neoliberalism was not the only game in town. Over the next few years, however, the Socialists also showed that neoliberalism was not a universal script, but a set of ideas and institutions that change as they become domestically embedded. Rather than eviscerate the state, they expanded its revenues. Rather than give tax cuts to corporations and the upper class, the government increased the tax burden on them just as it offered universal access to health care, pensions and university education. Instead of seeing all state ownership as problematic for a healthy economy, the Socialists kept the state involved with industrial champions. Spain had embraced neoliberalism but not its libertarian implications. It was an “embedded neoliberalism” that balanced market capitalism with more egalitarian redistribution and state-enhanced growth strategies.⁸⁷

The German, Swedish and Spanish departures from Keynesianism were soon followed by the Italian and French socialists. In Italy, the Socialists coming to power in 1983 via a complex coalition advocated a policy package that outdid that of their conservative government partners in terms of macroeconomic austerity, privatization and financial deregulation, while relegating welfare and redistribution to residual importance.⁸⁸ By the late 1980s the party acquiesced to supply-side ideas about the desirability of cuts of corporate tax rates and top personal tax rates. In 1981, as Spanish Socialists were debating the party program, the new French Socialists government reversed the deflationary policies that the “proto-neoliberal” D’Estaig governments adopted in 1976 and launched a bold Keynesian stimulus doubled by dirigiste nationalizations, social democratic-style welfare expansion and

⁸⁷ Cornel Ban, *Neoliberalism in Translation: Neoliberal Ideas and Reforms in Spain and Romania*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Maryland, College Park, 2012).

⁸⁸ Spencer Di Scala, *Renewing Italian Socialism: Nenni to Craxi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Spencer Di Scala, ed., *Italian Socialism: Between Politics and History* (Amherst: Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Perry Anderson and Patrick Camiller, *Mapping the West European Left* (London: Routledge, 1994).

employment-generating policies.⁸⁹ As the American reflation faultily predicted by OECD did not materialize and the West was not pulling out of recession, the external environment severely constrained this policy experiment, leading to its reversal. Yet it was not until March 1983, well after PSOE decided on its neoliberal path,⁹⁰ that the internal debate inside the Socialist party elite ended and the *politique the rigueur* invoked by PSOE elites and scholarship was actually adopted).⁹¹

Similar transformations occurred in the rest of European social democracy during the mid 80s. Until they lost office in 1982, Danish and Dutch social democrats overcame their doubts about the primacy of full employment and refrained from embracing a Third Way course, but this resistance waned in the late 1980s.⁹² Danish social democrats maintained wage and social security indexation despite inflation levels rising above 10 percent.⁹³ Moreover, the data show that such tax cuts were made on the OECD average only after 1985.⁹⁴ Even so, tax

⁸⁹ See Prasad, *The Politics of Free Markets* and McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas*.

⁹⁰ Cornel Ban, *Neoliberalism*.

⁹¹ Also see Alistair Cole, "French socialists in office: Lessons from Mitterrand and Jospin," *Modern and Contemporary France* vol. 7, no. 1 (1999): 71–87. See also Vivian Schmidt, *From State to Market. The Transformation of French Business and Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1996): 110–13.

⁹² Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Politics against Markets* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Steven B. Wolinetz "Reconstructing Dutch Social Democracy: Programmatic and Organisational Review in the Dutch Labour Party," *West European Politics*, special issue on *Rethinking Social Democracy in Western Europe* (January, 1993), 97–111; Christoffer Green-Pedersen, *The Politics of Justification: Party Competition and Welfare-State Retrenchment in Denmark and the Netherlands From 1982 to 1998* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002); Niels Finn Christiansen and Klaus Petersen, "The Dynamics of Social Solidarity: The Danish Welfare State, 1900–2000," *Scandinavian Journal of History* vol. 26, no. 3 (2001): 177–97; Johannes Lindvall, "The Real but Limited Influence of Expert Ideas," *World Politics* vol. 61, no. 4 (2009): 703–30.

⁹³ Christoffer Green-Pedersen, "Still There But for How Long? The Counter-Intuitiveness of the Universal Welfare Model and the Development of the Universal Welfare State in Denmark," *Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies (CCWS) Working Paper* no. 31 (Aalborg: Aalborg University, 2003).

⁹⁴ Adriana Arreaza, Bent E. Sorensen and Yosha Oved, "Consumption Smoothing through Fiscal Policy in OECD and EU Countries," *NBER Working Papers* 6372 (1998), National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.

systems remained steeply progressive and in Scandinavia the top personal tax rates hovered over 50 percent.⁹⁵ Similarly, when some Scandinavian social democrats adopted “sound finance” objectives, they continued to emphasize fiscal, as opposed to monetary, policy as an instrument of macroeconomic management, a policy that remained in place after 1989.⁹⁶

During the late 1980s resistance to neoliberalism waned in Belgian and Austrian social democracy. In Belgium, two Socialist-Christian Democratic coalitions fell apart between 1980 and 1981 because the Socialists, unwavering in their commitment to full employment, wanted a Keynesian reflation and the conservatives wanted a Thatcherite turn. And while in opposition, Belgian Socialists bitterly opposed the macroeconomic austerity and supply-side policies of the center-right coalition that ruled between 1981 and 1985, yet by 1989 they came to agree with the basic tenets of neoliberalism. The liberal-conservative Belgian coalition ruled for five years (1981-1985) and by decree and according to premier Martens’ slogan ‘less democracy for a better economy.’ This government froze wage indexation, thus transferring productivity gains to firms, cut taxes, instituted job sharing agreements to cut unemployment, consolidated the country’s fiscal position and lowered select categories of unemployment benefits.⁹⁷

The same situation could be observed on the Austrian left. Here, until 1986 the social-democrats⁹⁸ stuck firmly to “Austro-Keynesian” policies that combined a hard currency policy vis-à-vis the DM with counter-cyclical deficit spending, employment in nationalized indus-

⁹⁵ Steffen Ganghof, “The Political Economy of High Income Taxation: Capital Taxation, Path Dependence, and Political Institutions in Denmark,” *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 40, no. 9 (September 2007): 1059–1084.

⁹⁶ Lindvall, “The Real but Limited Influence...,” *Idem*.

⁹⁷ See Anton Hemerijck and Jelle Visser, “Change and Immobility: Three Decades of Policy Adjustment in the Netherlands and Belgium,” *West European Politics* vol. 23, no. 2 (special issue, 2000): 229–56.

⁹⁸ Since the World War II SPÖ (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*) had been one the strongest left-wing parties in Europe, rivaled in strength only by the social-democratic parties of the Nordic countries (Geoffrey Garrett, *Partisan Politics in the Global Economy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 12.

tries to hoard labor during employment crisis to achieve their commitment to full employment. Austrian social democrats also resisted financial deregulation, tax cuts, labor market deregulation and maintained OECD's highest nationalized industrial sector until the late 1980s.⁹⁹ At a time when Spanish Socialists saw in a 5 percent budget deficit a sign of impending doom, their Austrian counterparts kept pushing policies based in the Keynesian idea that the state should accept a higher deficit for the sake of lower unemployment.¹⁰⁰ But, as elsewhere, a "tamed" version of liberalism was increasingly accepted before 1989.

The only exception was the British Labor Party and Greek Socialists. Although Labor had pioneered orthodox monetary policies in the late 1970s, the move was contested as imposed by duress from the outside and, once in opposition, the party's programs (1979; 1983; 1987) swung back to a radical left agenda: state-sponsored expansion of nationalised firms, indicative planning, industrial protectionism. The cases of Greek center-left parties were also far from pointing towards neoliberalism in 1982. Greek Socialists (PASOK) taking office in 1981 launched a Keynesian demand stimulus program doubled by planning arrangements for the private sector, welfare state, generous wage policy for low-income earners and employment protection schemes. Even as the plan sputtered in the face of a global recession and governmental inability to improve tax collection, PASOK did not signal a decisive turn towards lowering inflation via wage freezes until the spring of 1983. Even so, while the much-vaunted "austerity" of the PASOK government meant cutting inflation from 18.5 to 16.5

⁹⁹ Edward N. Muller, "Democracy, Economic Development, and Income Inequality," *American Sociological Review* 53:1 (1988): 50–68; Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka, eds., *The Kreisky Era in Austria* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Pub., 1994); Alois Guger, "Austria's International Ranking of Unit Labour Costs Remained Unchanged in 2001," *WIFO Monatsberichte* vol. 75, no. 9 (September 2002): 573–79; Kurt R. Luther "Austria: From Moderate to Polarized Pluralism?" in D. Broughton and M. Donovan, eds., *Changing Party Systems in Western Europe* (London/New York: Pinter, 1999), 118–42; Brigitte Unger and Karin Heitzmann, "The adjustment path of the Austrian welfare state: back to Bismarck?" *Journal of European Social Policy* vol. 13, no. 4 (2003): 371–87.

¹⁰⁰ Ute Behning and Monika Feigl-Heihs, "Die Zukunft des europäischen Sozialmodells," Projektbericht, Vienna: HIS 2001.

percent in three years, the first serious attempt at macroeconomic stabilization involving devaluation, systemic wage control and attempts to control the budget deficit were not advocated until after 1985, with little success, as government gross investment increased dramatically until 1986 and general government deficit nearly doubled between 1982 and 1985 (from 6.5 to 11.5 percent). Practically, a coherent and comprehensive turn to orthodox economic policies under PASOK rule could not be noticed until after 1993.¹⁰¹

Conclusions

Social democracy went from a revisionist reading of Marx in the first decades of the twentieth century to the “Third Way” or one of the more progressive readings of liberalism towards the end of the century. But it was the midcentury that was social democracy’s “golden age.” It was then that social democracy became the party of the radical reform of capitalism and became the most successful socio-political paradigm of the postwar years. Its ideas were shared by progressive liberals and conservatives alike: generous welfare states and labor regulations, steeply progressive taxation systems, and employment-producing/maintaining public sectors. As the golden age of social democracy was coming to an end in the 1970s, scholars found that the more democracy and social democratic rule a country had experienced, the lower the share of national income taken by the highest income categories and the larger the share of the national income being distributed. It was also during this time that social-democratic parties defined the “best practices” of political modernity by developing a solid and consistent mass base for political life.

¹⁰¹ Michalis Psalidopoulos, “Keynesianism across Nations: The Case of Greece,” *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* vol. 3, no. 3 (1996): 449–62; S. P. Brissimis and H. D. Gibson, “Monetary policy, capital inflows and disinflation in Greece” *Economic Bulletin*, Bank of Greece vol. 9 (1997): 21–38; Thanos Skouras, “The Greek Experiment with the Third Way,” in *The Economics of the Third Way: Experiences from Around the World. Experiences from around the World* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2001), 170–82.

To a great extent the “golden age” of this political project relied on the economic institutions of “embedded liberalism,” whereby partial trade liberalization was combined with domestic institutions that cushioned the socially deleterious effects of market dislocations through fixed rates and capital controls. Most importantly, however, the social-democratic project rested on the ideas of Keynesian economics. Anchored not in Marxism but in a progressive reading of liberalism, the Keynesian policy paradigm departed from the assumption that the private sector was fundamentally unstable to emphasize the role of the government in influencing growth rates, employment and production through a combination of fiscal and monetary policies. By merging Keynesianism with a deradicalized reading of Marxist revisionism, midcentury social democrats saved both capitalism and a crisis-ridden social democracy through a win-win game between capital, labor and the state.

This political equilibrium vanished and this study set out to find out whether 1989 was its death knell, as some scholars and political practitioners suggest. The main finding is that the neoliberal counter-revolution in economics that began in the 1970s dramatically redefined social democracy by depriving it of the Keynesian policy paradigm, making possible its success at mitigating the vagaries of the market and improving the economic conditions of wage earners and the unemployed. As my analysis of all European social-democratic parties shows, by the time Leninist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, this rightward shift of social democracy had been complete almost everywhere, and in retrospect it is clear that this was due to debates that were endogenous to West European politics and economics rather than to what was happening across the Iron Curtain.

During the 1980s neoliberal ideas began to enter the economic policy conventions of social-democratic parties. German social democrats had shifted away from Keynesianism in the mid 1970s. Yet neoliberal “pragmatism” was far from cannibalizing the economic policy identity of a critical mass of European social-democratic parties, then in government or opposition. Rather than a generalized neoliberal swing, in the late 1970s and early 1980s the West European center-left offered instead a mosaic of reactions: outright resistance to neoliberalism (British Labor Party, Belgian Socialists, Dutch, Austrian and Danish social-democrats), resistance followed by accommoda-

tion (French Socialists), and early accommodation (Italian socialists, Swedish and German social-democrats). By the late 1980s the mosaic melted into a new consensus, in which the marriage between the welfare state and the policy implications of the end of Keynesian macroeconomics was the best that Bernstein's followers had to offer.

But a potential social-democratic resurgence requires more than taking pride in prior achievements and using better economic ideas. While the track record of social-democrats gives them every reason to boast their managerial skills, the recent success of the right in the middle of a severe crisis shows that politics demand more than reasoned argument. Perhaps social-democrats must relearn the old lexicon of the left—its unequivocal critique of injustice, humiliation, and lack of dignity. If updated, this lexicon could be used to redirect public anger into a progressive agenda. Importantly, this reinvention should not be conceived of as a mere intellectual exercise. Social-democratic politics was once the politics of passion. As anger grows throughout Europe and the achievements of the welfare state are targeted one by one, this politics should be embraced again. There is much public anger as larger and larger swathes of the population are asked to work longer, for less pay and with less security. There is anger at growing inequalities of wealth and opportunity. When not properly addressed, all this anger can turn into attempts to make our societies less open and perhaps even less democratic. The current metastasis of social injustices breeds not only anger, but also fear that things will get worse. Unless those with more resources are asked to pay more for the basic costs of civilization, no managerial wisdom can allay such fears. Unless the social contract is renegotiated on the social-democratic principle of social citizenship, the low intensity warfare we see emerging in some of our cities can mutate in even more widespread and undesirable forms.

Part Two

MOVING AWAY FROM THE COLD WAR

MARK KRAMER

The Demise of the Soviet Bloc

In the mid-1980s, just before Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the East-West divide in Europe seemed as stark as ever. Both the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had deployed new nuclear missiles against each other, and tensions between the two sides were acute. Certainly no one expected that, before the decade was out, the Communist regimes in East-Central Europe would collapse peacefully (apart from violence in Romania) and that the Berlin Wall—the symbolic divide in Europe for nearly 30 years—would be opened.

The momentous events of 1989 led to drastic changes in the political complexion of Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. In the mid- to late 1940s, Communist governments had taken power throughout the region under Soviet auspices. For more than forty years, those governments dominated political and economic life in Eastern Europe. The sudden downfall of the Communist regimes in 1989 and the opening of the Berlin Wall are sometimes depicted as the inevitable result of a lengthy process of systemic decay. But in fact there was nothing inevitable about the outcome. Popular opposition to the Communist regimes had long been intense almost everywhere in Eastern Europe, as demonstrated by the uprisings in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in June 1953, the rebellions in Poland and Hungary in June and October 1956, the public acclaim for the Prague Spring in 1968, and the rise of Solidarity (*Solidarność*, which was both a free trade union and a social movement) in Poland in 1980-1981. What changed in 1989, compared to earlier crises in Eastern Europe, was not the depth of popular opposition to

the Soviet-backed regimes. Instead, what changed was the whole thrust of Soviet policy in the region. The largely peaceful collapse of East European Communism in 1989 was due as much to the fundamental reorientation of Soviet foreign policy under Mikhail Gorbachev as to the courage and restraint of protesters in Eastern Europe. Admirable as the protesters were, none of what they achieved would have been possible without the drastic changes in Moscow that allowed the events to occur.

Even though Gorbachev's reorientation of Soviet policy was a prerequisite for the events of 1989, it was hardly sufficient. In retrospect we know that leeway for radical change was available in 1989, but at the time no one outside the CPSU Politburo could be fully sure of that. At Gorbachev's behest, the Politburo had secretly decided in the spring of 1989 to refrain from any military intervention in Eastern Europe, no matter what happened to the Communist regimes there. But the Politburo also decided that it would not publicly disclose this decision and would not even confidentially inform the East European Communist leaders about it, for fear of demoralizing them. Hence, as events unfolded in the late spring, summer, and early fall of 1989, a good deal of uncertainty persisted at all levels in Eastern Europe about how the Soviet Union would respond in an emergency. Memories of past Soviet military interventions in Eastern Europe, especially in 1953, 1956, and 1968, were still vivid for most people in the region. Amid this uncertainty, drastic change in the Soviet bloc could not just occur on its own. Instead, millions of ordinary people had to overcome lingering concerns and fears to make it happen. The vast number of Poles who voted for *Solidarność* in Poland's June 1989 legislative elections, the hundreds of thousands of Hungarians who gathered for the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy in Budapest less than two weeks later, the huge crowds of East Germans who took part in protest demonstrations in cities throughout the GDR in October and November 1989, and the millions of Czechs and Slovaks who participated in the Velvet Revolution against the hard-line Czechoslovak Communist regime in November 1989, all played crucial roles.

The events of 1989 resulted in part from sweeping changes in Soviet policy, in part from the courageous actions of individuals and groups in Eastern Europe, and in part from the loss of will among hard-line East European Communist leaders as they realized, to their

horror, that the Soviet Union would no longer come to their aid with military force. The rapidly improving state of East-West relations was an important backdrop for the process, giving Soviet leaders greater confidence that Western governments would not seek to foment anti-Soviet uprisings or exploit changes in Eastern Europe against the USSR. In addition, an element of chance and contingency contributed to the auspicious outcome in the fall of 1989, especially to the opening of the Berlin Wall, which occurred as much through inadvertence as through design. Paradoxically, the Chinese authorities' brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in Beijing in June 1989 helped to spur the reorientation of Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe, providing as it did a stark example of the violence that Gorbachev desperately wanted to avoid in the Warsaw Pact countries.

This article looks at each of these sources of change in Eastern Europe, highlighting the interaction between them. The article then briefly recounts how the Berlin Wall was finally opened in November 1989, and concludes by explaining why Gorbachev, who had sought both to strengthen the socialist camp and to end the Cold War, achieved the latter objective but not the former. The analysis here underscores the importance of individual agency as well as larger social forces in revolutionary upheavals, but it also reveals how uncertain, confusing, and unpredictable such events can seem as they are under way. Although the key participants in the 1989 crises did not foresee the full cumulative impact of their actions, the effects were ultimately global in scope. The demise of Communist regimes in the Warsaw Pact countries not only eliminated the Cold War divide in Europe but also had a transformative spillover in the Third World—particularly Mongolia, Latin America, and southern Africa—in 1989 and after.

Initial Continuity

Until the rise of Gorbachev, Soviet leaders after World War II regarded Eastern Europe as an extension of their own country's frontiers. Threats to the security of an East European Communist regime, whether external or internal, were seen as threats to Soviet security as well. This sentiment took its most explicit form in the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine, the term coined in the West after August 1968 to

refer to a series of authoritative statements by Leonid Brezhnev and other Soviet officials justifying the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Doctrine linked the fate of every Communist country with the fate of all other Communist countries, required Soviet-bloc governments to abide by the norms of Marxism-Leninism as interpreted in Moscow, and subordinated the “abstract sovereignty” of socialist states to the “laws of class struggle.”¹

After Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, the Soviet-East European relationship initially underwent little change. In the mid-1990s, after the Soviet Union collapsed, Gorbachev claimed that he had informed the East European governments as early as 1985 that the Soviet Union would no longer come to their aid under any circumstances.² That claim has been repeated by a few of Gorbachev’s former advisers.³ Their retrospective assertions, however, have been undermined by a plethora of contemporaneous archival evidence that has emerged over the past decade-and-a-half in Russia and other former

¹ Mark Kramer, “The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 276–362.

² See, for example, Gorbachev’s comments in Mikhail Gorbachev and Zdeněk Mlýnář, *Conversations with Gorbachev: On Perestroika, the Prague Spring and the Crossroads of Socialism*, trans. by George Shriver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, originally published in Prague in 1995 under the title *Reformátoři nebývají šťastni: Dialog o “perestrojce,” Pražském jaru a socialismu*), 84–85. Gorbachev refers here to a meeting he convened shortly after becoming General Secretary. The full transcripts of that meeting, which were declassified in December 2010 after my repeated requests, contradict Gorbachev’s recollection of what he said there, as shown below. Evidently, Gorbachev was projecting back to 1985 a view that in fact he did not come to embrace until a few years later.

³ See, for example, the comments by Anatolii Chernyaev and Vadim Medvedev cited in Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), 571–72; and in Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249. One of the problems in relying on Chernyaev’s and Medvedev’s post-hoc testimony about this matter is that neither of them became an adviser to Gorbachev until 1986. Hence, they were not in a position to know what Gorbachev said (or did not say) to the leaders of the other Warsaw Pact countries in March–April 1985.

Warsaw Pact countries. Far from intending to let go of the Soviet bloc, Gorbachev arrived in office wanting to strengthen the military, political, economic, and ideological institutions that linked the Soviet Union with the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. On 6 March 1985, five days before Gorbachev became CPSU General Secretary and when he was still serving as CPSU Secretary for ideology, he met in Moscow with all the East European Communist party secretaries for ideology. He called on them to “intensify [their] ideological vigilance” and to strive for “much tighter cohesion in all spheres of the socialist commonwealth.” He concluded his presentation by declaring that every party and state official in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe “must be imbued with the spirit of constant readiness to defend socialist gains—the utmost task of all propaganda activity.”⁴ The phrase “defend socialist gains” was a core element of the Brezhnev Doctrine, as everyone at the meeting would have been aware.

In subsequent months, after taking over as the CPSU General Secretary, Gorbachev promoted greater economic integration within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and an expansion of political-military cooperation among the members of the Warsaw Pact. In both respects, his early policies displayed strong continuity with the policies of his predecessors. Gorbachev’s manner of presentation may have been more dynamic, but at no time during

⁴ “Stenogramma pervogo (utrennego) zasedaniya vstupitel’noe slova chlena Politbyuro, sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva pri otkrytii Vstrechi, utverzhdenie poryadka predsedatel’stvovaniya na zasedaniyakh, poryadka i reglamenta raboty, obmen maneniyami po obsuzhdaemym voprosam,” Verbatim Stenogram with corrections marked by hand (Top Secret), 6 March 1985, in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI), Fond (F.) 10, Opis’ (Op.) 1, Delo (D.) 548, List (L.) 1-148. See also the subsequent discussion, “Stenogramma vtorogo (vechernego) zasedaniya prodolzhenie obmena mneniyami po obsuzhdaemym voprosam, prinyatie teksta kratkogo soobshcheniya dlya pechati, zaklyuchitel’noe slovo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. V. Zimyanina pri zakrytii Vstrechi,” Verbatim Stenogram with corrections marked by hand (Top Secret), 6 March 1985, in RGANI, F. 10, Op. 1, D. 549, Ll. 1-81. Vadim Zagladin, the CPSU official overseeing international information and propaganda activities, drafted Gorbachev’s speech for this gathering. See “Vystuplenie—proekt,” Draft Text, 18 February 1985, in Arkhiv Gorbachev-Fonda (AGF), F. 3, Dokument (Dok.) 4487, Ll. 1-10.

his initial years in office did he disavow the Brezhnev Doctrine or display the slightest inclination to accept the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. In a secret memorandum to the CPSU Politburo, Gorbachev emphasized that “although the countries of socialism have endured serious internal and external challenges, not a single one of [these countries] has suffered a return to the old order”—a record he clearly took great pride in and aspired to uphold.⁵

The declassified transcripts from Gorbachev’s meetings and communications with East European officials belie the notion that the new Soviet leader at any point in 1985-1988 told the Warsaw Pact governments—or even hinted—that the Soviet Union would no longer take action to counter dire threats to Communist rule in Eastern Europe. He never said anything remotely like that to his East European counterparts during his first few years as CPSU General Secretary, and indeed the records show that he frequently said the opposite, especially in his first year as he consolidated power. Immediately after Gorbachev took office, he pledged that his “first priority” in foreign policy would be “to protect and strengthen as much as possible the fraternal friendship with our closest comrades-in-arms and allies, the countries of the great socialist commonwealth.”⁶ In early bilateral meetings with the East European party leaders, Gorbachev urged them to step up their “fight against the encroachments of imperialism” and to “do everything possible to undermine the aggressive attempts . . . made by class enemies [who] are nowadays seeking to achieve the ideological dissolution of socialism from within.”⁷ At an important plenum of the CPSU Central Committee in April 1985, Gorbachev called for “the improvement and enrichment of cooperation among the fraternal socialist countries in every possible way, the development of compre-

⁵ “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” Memorandum from M. S. Gorbachev to the CPSU Politburo, 25 June 1986 (Secret), supplement to Point 1 of Politburo Protocol No. 18, in Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (APRF), F. 3, Op. 102, D. 218, Ll. 4, 5.

⁶ “Rech’ General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS tovarishcha M.S. Gorbacheva na Plenum TsK KPSS 11 marta 1985 god.,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 12 March 1985), 3.

⁷ See, for example, the notes of Gorbachev’s meeting with the Polish leader Wojciech Jaruzelski, 7 April 1985, in AGF, F. 3, Dok. 4380, Ll. 5-8.

hensive ties, the assurance of close collaboration in the political, economic, ideological, military, and other spheres, and the organic merger of the national and international interests of all members of the great [socialist] commonwealth.”⁸ The official Soviet TASS and Novosti press agencies prominently highlighted all of these comments in their wire dispatches about Gorbachev’s speech at the plenum.

A few days later, on 26 April, when Gorbachev and the other East-bloc leaders gathered in Moscow to extend the Warsaw Pact for an additional thirty years, the participants issued a joint communiqué vowing to “increase their close cooperation in international affairs” and “reinforce their efforts to strengthen the combat cohesion of the alliance.”⁹ Nothing more about the proceedings was released at the time, but the declassified records show that Gorbachev, in his keynote speech at the meeting, praised the “unity of action” that had “thwarted the attempts by imperialism to subvert or ‘destroy’ the socialist order in any of the fraternal countries,” a clear reference to the events of 1968 and 1980-1981 when challenges to Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were forcibly suppressed.¹⁰ Gorbachev also lauded “our joint efforts in accomplishing a task of historic importance—we have reached military-strategic parity with NATO. This was not at

⁸ “Plenum Central’nogo Komiteta TsK KPSS, 22-23 aprelya 1985 god.,” 22-23 April 1985 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 347, L. 12. Gorbachev’s speech was published the next day as “O sozyve ocherednogo XXVII S”ezda KPSS i zadachakh svyazannykh s ego podgotovkoi i provedeniem: Doklad General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 23 1985), 2.

⁹ “Kommyunike o vstreche vysshikh partiinykh i gosudarstvennykh deyatelei stran-uchastnits Varshavskogo Dogovora,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow, 27 April 1985), 1-2.

¹⁰ The passages quoted here are from the verbatim text of Gorbachev’s speech, with corrections marked in by hand, “Vystuplenie General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva na vstreche 26 aprelya 1985 god.: Teksty okonchateln’yi i s redaktsionnymi pravkami,” Stenogram (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 10, Op. 3, D. 149, Ll. 1-44. For a Czech version of Gorbachev’s speech, translated from the original Russian, see “Vystoupení generálního tajemníka ÚV Komunistické strany Sovětského svazu soudruha M. S. Gorbačova: Příloha IV/d,” 26 April 1985, 8696/24, in Český Národní Archiv (ČNA), Archiv Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa (Arch. ÚV KSČ), PÚV 47/85, Listí (Ll.) 1-11.

all easy to do.” He made clear that the Warsaw Pact must never fall behind in its ability to “wage an active fight against the military threat” from NATO:

Military-strategic parity is a vital prerequisite for the security of the socialist states. Understandably, safeguarding the military balance has required—and, if the situation does not improve, will continue to require—a great deal of resources and effort. But without this it will be impossible to defend socialist gains. This is our common affair, the success of which will depend on contributions from every socialist state.¹¹

Far from displaying any inclination to relax Soviet military-political ties with the East European states, Gorbachev demanded “a unified line” and “stricter coordination of efforts” to “consolidate the position of socialism.”¹² His insistence that the Warsaw Treaty be extended by thirty years rather than a much shorter period (of perhaps five to ten years) as some East European officials had wanted, and his determination to prevent any changes in the basic text of the treaty (or in the top-secret supplementary Provisions on the Unified Command of the Armed Forces of the Member-States of the Warsaw Pact), underscored his desire to push for greater cohesion and integration between the Soviet Union and its East European allies.

This same approach, with its echoes of the policies adopted by previous Soviet leaders toward Eastern Europe, was evident during other high-level deliberations in Moscow in 1985 and 1986. At meetings of the CPSU Politburo and CPSU Secretariat, Gorbachev called for an expansion of political and military ties within the Warsaw Pact and promised to safeguard the “underlying path of development of our cooperation with the other socialist countries.”¹³ The recently

¹¹ “Vystuplenie General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva na vstreche 26 aprelya 1985 god.,” L. 2.

¹² Ibid., L. 8.

¹³ “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 26 iyunya 1986 god.: Zapiska tov. Gorbacheva M. S. o nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsialisticheskimi stranami,” Politburo Protocol No. 18 (Top Secret), 26 June 1986, in RGANI, F. 89, Op. 36, D. 19, L. 1.

declassified transcripts and notes from these meetings and from other secret high-level discussions in 1985 and 1986 further contravene the notion that Gorbachev decided at an early stage to leave the East European states to their own devices.¹⁴ The archival evidence shows that although Gorbachev was critical of some of the policies of his predecessors (including their failure to develop much greater economic and political integration within the bloc), he was certainly not proposing that the Soviet Union should or could stand by if Communist rule in Eastern Europe were in danger of collapsing.¹⁵ On the contrary, he believed that fortifying Soviet ties with the Warsaw Pact countries would help to avert potential crises akin to those in the past. He vowed that the USSR would establish “greater [Communist] party control” over Soviet-East European relations and “strengthen the unity of

¹⁴ Notes from CPSU Politburo meetings and many other high-level discussions from 1985 to 1991 were gathered in 2003–2004 by the Gorbachev Foundation for transcription in a planned six-volume document collection titled *Kak “delalas” politika perestroiki* (KDPP) that originally was slated to appear in 2004. Unfortunately, Gorbachev decided not to publish the volumes, which would have come to more than 3,500 pages in total. Later on, he did permit a much abridged single volume to appear—A. Chernyaev et al., eds., *V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: Po zapisyam Anatoliya Chernyaeva, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgiya Shakhnazarova* (Moscow: Al’pina Biznes-Buks, 2006)—as well as a collection of documents pertaining to Soviet policy in Germany: Aleksandr Galkin and Anatolii Chernyaev, eds., *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros: Sbornik dokumentov, 1986–1991* (Moscow: Ves’ mir, 2006). In 2010, another thick volume was published with notes and materials (including some already publicly available) from Gorbachev’s meetings and conversations with foreign leaders—A. S. Chernyaev and A. B. Veber, eds., *Otvechaya na vyzov vremeni: Vneshnya politika perestroiki—Dokumental’nye svidetel’sva* (Moscow: Ves’ mir, 2010)—but the other documents planned for KDPP have not yet been made generally available. Fortunately, Anatolii Chernyaev, who oversaw the project and would have preferred to release all of the materials, agreed to give me (as well as other researchers) access to the unpublished volumes when I was in Moscow numerous times from 2005 to 2009. I am grateful to Chernyaev for the opportunity to go through all of the documents.

¹⁵ See, for example, “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” Ll. 1–6; “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 26 iyunya 1986 god.,” Ll. 1–2; and “Politbyuro, 3 iyulya 1986: Rabochaya zapis’,” Notes from CPSU Politburo meeting (Secret), 3 July 1986, in KDPP, vol. 1, 152–56.

the socialist countries and counter any centrifugal tendencies” in the Warsaw Pact.¹⁶ Although he said it would be pointless to treat the East European states like “little children who need to be brought to kindergarten,” he was convinced that the Soviet Union’s “objective interests demand unity and cohesion among the countries of socialism” as well as “comprehensive coordination of all foreign policy actions.” The East European governments, he argued in mid-1986, “know that any initiative they put forth must enjoy our support and must be coordinated with us, or else it will never get anywhere and will be doomed from the start.”¹⁷ Gorbachev assured his colleagues on the CPSU Politburo that the Soviet Union would continue to be, as it had been under his predecessors, “the leader of the socialist world and the [military] guarantor of the security and socialist gains of the fraternal countries.”¹⁸

Gorbachev expressed similar views whenever he spoke with East European leaders during his first few years in office. In a series of bilateral and multilateral meetings with high-ranking East European officials in 1985 and early 1986, Gorbachev urged them to pursue closer military, political, and economic integration with the Soviet Union. In 1985 alone, five separate gatherings of Warsaw Pact leaders were convened, including two in March and one in November, shortly after Gorbachev returned from his first summit meeting with Ronald Reagan in Geneva. Gorbachev assured the East European leaders that the Soviet Union would show “respect for [their countries’] experience and understanding of [their] national specifics” and would support their “quest to follow national paths” to socialism. But he made these pledges in the expectation that the Warsaw Pact leaders would facilitate, rather than impede, the “strengthening of our cooperation, cohesion, and unity.” Gorbachev left no doubt that his main aim in Eastern Europe was to “develop comprehensive cooperation on all matters with coun-

¹⁶ “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” Ll. 4, 5.

¹⁷ The quoted passages here and in the previous sentence are from Gorbachev’s keynote speech to a closed meeting of the Soviet Foreign Ministry Collegium, 28 May 1986, declassified and published in M. S. Gorbachev, *Gody trudnykh reshenii* (Moscow: Al’fa-print, 1993), 46–55.

¹⁸ “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” L. 5.

tries of the socialist commonwealth.”¹⁹ The new CPSU Program that was adopted at the 27th Soviet Party Congress in March 1986 spoke explicitly about the need for “mutual assistance” in “defending socialist gains” and about the paramount importance of “socialist internationalism” for the Soviet bloc—the essence of the Brezhnev Doctrine.²⁰

In the months following the 27th Soviet Party Congress, Gorbachev continued to stress the need for increased discipline and cohesion in the Soviet bloc, a theme he voiced both at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact’s Political Consultative Committee (PCC) in June 1986 and at the 10th Congress of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) a few weeks later. At the PCC meeting, he called for “increasingly close cooperation among the socialist countries” and highlighted the “great need for an increase in common action.”²¹ At the PZPR congress, Gorbachev argued that the development of “cooperative links among the socialist countries” should be given “absolute priority” and should extend to all areas—“political, economic, cultural, and military.”²² In a thinly-veiled reaffirmation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, he declared that “socialist gains are irreversible” and that any attempt by internal or external forces to “wrench a country away from the socialist commonwealth would mean encroaching not only on the will of the people [in that country], but also on the entire postwar order and, in the final analysis, on peace.” His lengthy comments supporting the Polish regime’s martial-law crackdown in December 1981 on the Solidarity movement (which he characterized as the “internal enemies of socialist Poland”) reinforced the point.²³

¹⁹ “Niederschrift über das Treffen der Generalsekretäre und Ersten Sekretäre der Zentralkomitees der Bruderparteien der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages am 23. Oktober 1985 in Sofia,” 23 October 1985 (Top Secret), in *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv* (SAPMO), *Zentrales Parteiarchiv* (ZPA), IV 2/1/638.

²⁰ “Programma Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soyuza,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 7 March 1986), 7.

²¹ “Niederschrift über die interne Beratung der Generalsekretäre und Ersten Sekretäre der Bruderparteien der Mitgliedsstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages am 11. 6. 1986 in Budapest,” 11 June 1986, in SAPMO, DY/30/2353, Blatt (Bl.) 11.

²² “X Zjazd Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej—wystąpienie tow. Gorbaczowa M. S.,” *Trybuna Ludu* (Warsaw, 1 July 1986), 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, I.

On the other hand, some seemingly modest steps that went largely unnoticed laid the groundwork for more sweeping changes in the years ahead. Gorbachev's decision in February 1986 to hire Anatolii Chernyaev as a foreign policy adviser augured a fresh approach to Soviet foreign policy generally. Chernyaev, a long-time official at the CPSU International Department, was known as a sharp, innovative thinker, and he soon became one of Gorbachev's close aides. The appointment in March 1986 of Vadim Medvedev as the CPSU Secretary responsible for intra-bloc affairs, replacing Konstantin Rusakov (who had held the post since 1977), brought in another official on whom Gorbachev could rely to instill greater flexibility into the CPSU Department for Ties with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries, the body most directly responsible for policy toward Eastern Europe.²⁴ In September 1986 Medvedev designated the long-time deputy head of that CPSU department, Georgii Shakhnazarov, to become first deputy head in place of Oleg Rakhmanin. Shakhnazarov at the time was already known as a reform-minded official, and he subsequently (from 1988) proved to be one of the chief advisers to Gorbachev on Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe, often working with Chernyaev. (A comparison of Shakhnazarov's and Chernyaev's memoranda for Gorbachev shows that the two advisers were in broad agreement about the need for far-reaching change in foreign policy, but that Chernyaev tended to be bolder than Shakhnazarov, whose somewhat more cautious inclinations were closer to Gorbachev's own outlook.)

More importantly, the official whom Shakhnazarov replaced, Rakhmanin, was a notorious hardliner who had published an article in *Pravda* in June 1985 that cast a pall on Soviet-East European relations.²⁵ The article warned the East European governments not to adopt any market-oriented economic reforms or political measures that would "compromise Marxism-Leninism as the basis of the fraternal states' unity" and "distort the general laws of socialist construction."

²⁴ See Medvedev's first-hand account, *Raspad: Kak on nazreval v "mirovoi sisteme sotsializma"* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994).

²⁵ The article was published pseudonymously as O. Vladimirov, "Vedushchii faktor mirovogo revolyutsionnogo protsessa," *Pravda* (Moscow, 21 June 1985), 3–4.

The article also repeatedly stressed the “common responsibility of all the socialist countries for the fate of world socialism” and declared that “on all major international issues the foreign policy of the USSR and of the Marxist-Leninist core of world socialism is identical.” Chernyaev later wrote that Gorbachev was deeply irritated by the unexpected appearance of Rakhmanin’s article, which apparently was published without sufficient authorization from the highest levels.²⁶ At a CPSU Politburo meeting a week after the article appeared, Gorbachev voiced his displeasure and rebuked Rakhmanin’s superiors.²⁷ Although Gorbachev decided not to remove Rakhmanin immediately, the eventual appointment of Shakhnazarov as the department’s new first deputy chief was a sign that concrete changes in Soviet policy toward the bloc might finally be coming.

Nevertheless, despite these glimmers of movement, Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe during Gorbachev’s early years continued to reflect much of the residue of the past. When the Warsaw Pact’s Military Council met in November 1986, the commander-in-chief of the alliance’s joint armed forces, Marshal Viktor Kulikov, told the East European participants that the “growing danger of war” with NATO “compels us to adopt measures that will bolster the security of our countries and our peoples and to increase the combat readiness of the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact member-states.”²⁸ The following month, at a meeting of the Pact’s Council of Defense Ministers, a Soviet deputy defense minister, Army-General Evgenii Ivanovskii, reported that the Soviet Union planned to “deploy airborne assault forces on a wide scale in order to give a more dynamic character to

²⁶ A. S. Chernyaev, *Shest’ let s Gorbachevym: Po dnevnikovym zapisyam* (Moscow: Progress-Kul’tura, 1993), 49–51. Chernyaev’s account contains two minor mistakes, giving Rakhmanin’s surname as Rakhmaninov and referring to July instead of June.

²⁷ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS, 29 iyunya 1985 god.,” Notes from CPSU Politburo Meeting (Top Secret), in KDPP, vol. 1, 21–25.

²⁸ “Wesentlicher Inhalt der Ausführungen des Oberkommandierenden der Vereinten Streitkräfte zu den Ergebnissen und Schlußfolgerungen, die sich aus dem Treffen in Reykjavik ergeben,” GVS No. A-470 410 (Top Secret), 10 November 1986, in Militärarchiv-Bundesarchiv (MA-BA), VA-01/32647, Bl. 2.

[the Warsaw Pact's joint] offensive operations."²⁹ In subsequent months, the Soviet defense minister, Marshal Sergei Sokolov, repeatedly vowed both publicly and privately that the Warsaw Pact countries would "never under any circumstances permit [NATO] to gain military superiority" over them. Sokolov emphasized that the USSR and its allies would have to maintain a "high level of combat readiness" for the indefinite future, and he called on the East European governments to contribute more to the Warsaw Pact's joint defense efforts.³⁰

Gorbachev himself remained cautious in his statements and actions vis-à-vis the Soviet bloc during the first several months of 1987, both publicly and privately. He held out hopes of change, but not change of a fundamental nature. When he met with senior East European officials in a closed session in mid-February 1987, he assured them that the Soviet Union "will not impose its own policy on anyone and will not call on you to act like us. We will, however, hope for solidarity and for understanding."³¹ He echoed these basic sentiments two months later during a long-awaited visit to Czechoslovakia. In his main public speech in Prague, Gorbachev declared that the Soviet Union was not "calling on anyone to imitate us. Every socialist country has its own specific features, and the fraternal [Communist] parties determine their own political line with an eye to national conditions." He insisted that "the entire system of political relations between the socialist countries can and must be based unswervingly on a foundation of equality and mutual responsibility," and he pledged that the

²⁹ Thesen zum Vortrag des Oberbefehlshabers der Landstreitkräfte und Stellvertreters des Ministers für Verteidigung der UdSSR, Armeegeneral J. F. Iwanowski, auf der 19. Sitzung des Komitees der Verteidigungsminister der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages zum dritten Tagesordnungspunkt 'Schaffung und Gefechtseinsatz der Luftsturmtruppen unter der Marineinfanterie in den verbündeten Armeen und Flotten,' VVS-No. A 470 389 (Top Secret), 1–3 December 1986, in MA-BA, DVW 1/7 1046, Bl. 2.

³⁰ See, for example, "Wesentlicher Inhalt der Ausführungen des Ministers für Verteidigung der UdSSR, Genossen Marschall der Sowjetunion Sokolow, am 18 Mai 1987," Notes from Sokolov's Remarks to Warsaw Pact Defense Ministers, No. 1c\021\87 (Top Secret), 18 May 1987, in MA-BA, VA-01/40373, Bl. 124–28.

³¹ "Vstrecha Gorbacheva s sekretaryami TsK bratskikh partii po sel'skomu khozyaistvu, 11 fevryalya 1987 god.," Transcript of Discussion (Top Secret), 11 February 1987, transcribed in KDPP, vol. 2, 89–91.

Soviet Union would not “lay claim to a special status in the socialist world” or infringe on the “independence of every [Communist] party, its responsibility to its people, and its right to resolve problems of its country’s development in a sovereign way.”³²

Even though this rhetoric sounded a bit different from that of past Soviet leaders, Gorbachev qualified each of these assertions with language distinctly reminiscent of the Brezhnev Doctrine. After stating that the USSR would not seek to impose its ideas and policies on other Communist countries, he added: “At the same time, we do not conceal our conviction that perestroika in the Soviet Union is in accordance with the very essence of socialism and the justified needs of social progress.” A short while later, after referring to the right of every Communist party to resolve its own country’s problems in its own way, Gorbachev immediately qualified this with the stricture that each member of the socialist commonwealth must show “obligatory consideration not only for its own interests but also for the common interests” of the whole socialist camp, a phrase taken more or less verbatim from the Brezhnev Doctrine.³³

Gorbachev’s continued ambivalence about Soviet-East European relations was also reflected in his attempt during his visit to Czechoslovakia not to discuss, either favorably or unfavorably, the August 1968 invasion and the repressive “normalization” that followed it in Czechoslovakia. When confronted unexpectedly about the issue during a tour of Bratislava, he first tried to avoid a direct answer, describing the Prague Spring and ensuing crisis as a “stern school” and a “difficult period” that the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia had “experienced together with dignity and honor.” But then he suddenly added a blunt endorsement of the Soviet invasion: “We [in Moscow and Prague] have bravely thought about what happened. ... We came to the right conclusions then. Look how far Czechoslovakia has advanced since 1968.”³⁴

³² “Miting Chekhoslovatsko-sovetskoi družby: Rech’ tovarishcha Gorbacheva M. S.,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 11 April 1987), 2.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Obshchie tseli, edinyi kurs: Prebyvanie M. S. Gorbacheva v Slovakiï,” *Pravda* (Moscow), 12 April 1987, 1. These remarks later inspired Zdeněk Mlýnář to offer a caustic assessment of Gorbachev’s 1987 visit, transcribed in Gorbachev and Mlýnář, *Conversations with Gorbachev*, 86-9.

Events in subsequent months also suggested that Gorbachev had not yet decided how boldly he was willing to act in recasting Soviet-East European relations. In his keynote speech in November 1987 marking the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power, he spoke briefly about Eastern Europe, declaring that “all [Communist] parties are fully and irreversibly independent. We said this as far back as the 20th [Soviet Party] Congress. True, it took time to free ourselves from old habits. Now, however, it is an immutable reality.”³⁵ But a few minutes later Gorbachev sharply narrowed this mandate by stipulating that intra-bloc relations must be based on “the practice of socialist internationalism,” including a “concern for the general cause of socialism.” He then added an even more explicit restatement of key elements of the Brezhnev Doctrine: “We know what damage can be caused by weakening the internationalist principle in mutual relations between socialist states, by deviating from the principles of mutual benefit and mutual assistance, and by failing to heed the common interests of socialism in action on the world scene.”³⁶

A similar message was conveyed in Gorbachev’s book *Perestroika*, which was published in dozens of countries just after the 70th anniversary celebrations (Gorbachev had worked extensively on it during a break in the late summer, assisted by a few key aides.) The book acknowledged certain shortcomings in Soviet relations with other Warsaw Pact countries in the past, and it pledged that every socialist state would have full independence to proceed along its own path of development. But the brief section on Eastern Europe went no further than Gorbachev’s earlier statements, and it contained a passage that linked the domestic complexion of each member of the socialist commonwealth with the interests of all others:

³⁵ “Oktyabr’ i perestroika: Revolyutsiya prodolzhaetsya—Doklad General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 3 November 1987), 5. In the weeks prior to Gorbachev’s speech, the CPSU Politburo discussed various drafts in great detail, but the often heated debate focused almost exclusively on how to reassess and present the darker periods of Soviet history. The sections on foreign policy, including Eastern Europe, did not spark any controversy.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The socialist community will be successful only if every party and state cares for both its own interests and common interests, if it respects its friends and allies, heeds their interests, and pays attention to the experience of others. Awareness of this relationship between domestic issues and the interests of world socialism is typical of the countries of the socialist community. We are united, in unity resides our strength.³⁷

For East European readers of the book, this assertion of a “relationship between domestic issues and the interests of world socialism” was bound to be evocative of the Brezhnev Doctrine. In no respect did the book imply that drastic change in the political complexion of Eastern Europe would ever be tolerated in Moscow.

Sources and Signs of Change in Soviet Policy

The year 1988 proved to be a turning point for the USSR on many key issues, both domestic and foreign. The Soviet-East European relationship was no exception. Soviet policy toward Warsaw Pact countries finally began to loosen in early 1988, adumbrating a fundamental reorientation of Gorbachev's approach. When the Soviet leader was confronted by stark choices and tradeoffs in relations with Eastern Europe, he opted to proceed more boldly, spawning events that soon went far beyond anything he had foreseen at the start.

THE CONTEXT OF POLICYMAKING

One of the reasons that Gorbachev was able to move ahead more decisively in 1988 is that by this point he had steadily expanded his power within the CPSU and had made many personnel changes that gave him greater leeway to act. His latitude was reinforced in the summer and fall of 1988 when he replaced numerous other long-time members of the CPSU Politburo and Central Committee who had become

³⁷ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 165.

alarmed by the increasingly unorthodox nature of developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe.³⁸ Although Gorbachev's consolidation of political power was not a *sufficient* condition for a drastic change of course vis-à-vis Eastern Europe, it clearly was a necessary condition. The new foreign policy that Gorbachev pursued in 1988 and especially 1989 would have been infeasible in the domestic environment of 1985 and 1986, even if he had been inclined to embrace a radical agenda during those early years (which he was not). By the time Gorbachev truly did want to make sweeping changes in Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe, he had amassed sufficient power to do so without fear of being ousted by hardline forces.

Gorbachev's inclination in 1988 to begin restructuring Soviet relations with Eastern Europe was spurred in part by the disappointing results of his early economic policies of *uskorenie* (acceleration). By mid-1988 he had come to believe that economic revitalization for both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe would be impossible in the absence of thoroughgoing political reform. When Gorbachev first took office in 1985, he assumed that an overhaul of the economy would not require far-reaching political liberalization. He had hoped that a combination of administrative reshuffling, personnel changes, and increased discipline and order would be sufficient to bring about sustained eco-

³⁸ On Gorbachev's consolidation of power, see Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*; Matthew Evangelista, "Norms, Heresthetics, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 3, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 5–35; Jerry F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985–1991* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997); George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Graeme J. Gill, *The Collapse of a Single Party System: The Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, "Whither Gorbachev: Soviet Policy and Politics in the 1990s," NIE-18-87 (Top Secret), November 1987; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "Gorbachev's Reorganization of the Party: Breaking the Stranglehold of the Apparatus," Research Paper No. SOV 89-10052X (Secret), June 1989; and CIA, "Gorbachev's Reform of the State Institutions: Toward a Parliamentary System?" Research Paper SOV 89-10024X, March 1989, all in CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.

conomic improvements.³⁹ But as the magnitude of Soviet economic problems became more apparent, Gorbachev increasingly emphasized political reforms to help mobilize popular support for his programs, to expose corrupt and incompetent officials, to undercut bureaucratic resistance to economic decentralization, and to yield more accurate economic and social data. This gradual shift in domestic priorities convinced Gorbachev that he also needed to scale back Soviet foreign and military policies that were financially burdensome and were apt to divert resources from urgent domestic needs. In particular, he wanted to ensure that he would not be forced to undertake the sorts of costly actions in Eastern Europe that had been deemed necessary in the past.

Gorbachev's decision to move ahead with far-reaching changes in Soviet-East European relations was also facilitated by the significant easing of East-West relations since 1985, reflected above all in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of December 1987, which had been achieved thanks to major Soviet concessions. Not only did Gorbachev believe that the improved international climate would allow him "to focus on constructive endeavors at home" and obtain much-needed technology from the West; he also was confident that NATO governments would not try to undercut the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Unlike in the past, when Soviet leaders feared that NATO would do everything it could to manipulate events in Eastern Europe against the USSR, Gorbachev was hopeful that the amelioration of East-West ties had created an opportunity for him to restructure Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe without endangering Soviet vital interests.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

The first notable indicator of a shift in Gorbachev's policy came during his visit to Yugoslavia in March 1988, when the two sides issued a joint communiqué pledging "unconditional" respect for "the prin-

³⁹ See, for example, the declassified notes from CPSU Politburo meetings in KDPP, vols. 1 and 2. See also CIA, "Rejuvenating the Soviet Party Apparatus," Intelligence Assessment No. SOV 86-10011 (Secret), February 1986, in CREST/NARA.

⁴⁰ "Za bez'yadernyi mir, za gumanizm mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii: Rech' M.S. Gorbacheva," *Pravda* (Moscow, 17 February 1987), 1.

ciples of equality and non-interference” and for “the independence of [Communist] parties and socialist countries to define, for themselves, the path of their own development.”⁴¹ Although most of the communiqué applied strictly to Soviet-Yugoslav relations, the phrases about independence, equality, and non-interference were described as applying to relations among *all* socialist countries. In subsequent months the Soviet Union made good on these pledges by providing the East European governments with much greater latitude for internal political liberalization and market-oriented economic reforms—latitude that Hungary and Poland (though not the four other Warsaw Pact member-states) were quick to exploit.

Moreover, for the first time, Soviet analysts began to reevaluate and criticize the whole postwar history of Soviet-East European relations. As early as May 1988 a lengthy article in the weekly publication *Literaturnaya gazeta* by the prominent “new thinker” Vyacheslav Dashichev stressed that the Soviet Union’s “hegemonic policies and great-power mentality” in Eastern Europe after 1945, as reflected in “the spread of Stalinist socialism wherever possible and its standardization in all countries regardless of their national features,” had been directly responsible for the cycle of “sharp confrontations” between the Soviet Union and its supposed “fraternal allies” in Eastern Europe.⁴² Dashichev condemned “the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist system in 1948 and the attribution of all deadly sins to its leaders for the simple reason that they had refused to submit to [Iosif] Stalin and obey his dictates.” The article also suggested that “hegemonism” and a domineering attitude toward Eastern Europe had continued under Stalin’s successors, leading in time to “armed clashes between socialist countries.” After berating the “stereotyped and cliché-ridden thinking and mentality of leading [Soviet] cadres who effectively became prisoners of their own propaganda,” Dashichev called for the “total surmounting of Stalinism in foreign policy” and for the rectification of “the mistakes and incompetent approach of the Brezhnevite leadership

⁴¹ Sovetsko-yugoslavskaya deklaratsiya, *Pravda* (Moscow, 19 March 1988), I.

⁴² Vyacheslav Dashichev, “Vostok-zapad: poisk novykh otnoshenii—O prioritetakh vneshnei politiki Sovetskogo gosudarstva,” *Literaturnaya gazeta* no. 20 (Moscow, 18 May 1988): 14. In December 1988, Dashichev’s article was voted one of the best to have appeared in *Literaturnaya gazeta* in 1988.

toward the resolution of foreign policy problems.”⁴³ By the summer of 1988, criticisms of this sort were appearing regularly in the Soviet press, generating a spirited and intense public debate.

The main elements of Dashichev’s critique were incorporated into a “discussion paper” compiled in mid-1988 by the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System (IEMSS), the only research institute in the Soviet Academy of Sciences that dealt primarily with Eastern Europe and intra-bloc ties. The authors of the paper called for drastic changes in Soviet-East European relations to overcome the “stagnant neo-Stalinism” bred by the “hegemonic aspirations” of earlier Soviet leaders.⁴⁴ Although the IEMSS did not have a direct role in the policymaking process, the institute was an important source of advice and information for senior officials in the CPSU and the Soviet government. The IEMSS director, Oleg Bogomolov, conferred with several of Gorbachev’s most trusted aides, including Shakhnazarov and Aleksandr Yakovlev. By disseminating the paper to policymakers and by publishing it in Moscow and abroad, the IEMSS specialists helped to make Soviet officials aware of the volatile conditions in Eastern Europe.

Gorbachev himself received a draft of the IEMSS paper from Shakhnazarov in June 1988 amid preparations for important meetings of CPSU organs and Warsaw Pact military-political bodies.⁴⁵ A cover note from Shakhnazarov summarizing the document was marked by Gorbachev in various places, indicating that he had read it (and presumably had also read the full draft). When the Soviet leader delivered his keynote speech at the CPSU’s 19th Party Conference in late June 1988, he echoed many points in the IEMSS document. Eschewing the platitudes used at earlier party gatherings, he condemned “the sediment that has accumulated on our relations” with the East European countries and promised that the Soviet Union in the future would adhere to a much different policy: “The external imposition of a social system, of a way of life, or of policies by any means, let alone mili-

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The paper was published in both Moscow and the West. See “East-West Relations and Eastern Europe: The Soviet Perspective,” *Problems of Communism* vol. 37, no. 3 (May–August 1988): 60–67.

⁴⁵ Memorandum from Shakhnazarov to Gorbachev, 18 May 1988, with draft of IEMSS paper attached, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 11731.

tary, is a dangerous trapping of the past.”⁴⁶ In subsequent months, Gorbachev returned to this theme many times, both publicly and privately. In February 1989, for example, when he met with senior party and state officials in Soviet Ukraine, he told them that the Soviet Union was “restructuring its relations with the socialist countries” and would henceforth emphasize “unconditional independence, full equality, strict non-interference in internal affairs, and rectification of deformities and mistakes linked with earlier periods in the history of socialism.”⁴⁷

The increasing boldness of Gorbachev’s pronouncements about Eastern Europe, combined with the publication of harsh reappraisals of earlier Soviet policies in the region (including condemnations of the Brezhnev Doctrine by name), fueled the ongoing political spillover from the Soviet Union into the other Warsaw Pact countries. As the pace of *perestroika* and *glasnost* accelerated in the USSR in the wake of the 19th Party Conference, the “winds of change” gradually filtered throughout the Communist bloc, bringing long-submerged grievances and social discontent to the surface. Under mounting popular pressure, the authorities in Hungary and Poland embarked on a wide array of ambitious reforms—more ambitious than what Gorbachev himself was pursuing. Rather than seeking to discourage or roll back the radical changes in Poland and Hungary, Gorbachev did just the opposite by praising developments in both countries.

The sweeping reorientation of Soviet-East European ties was symbolized in the latter half of 1988 by Gorbachev’s bid to restructure and scale back the CPSU’s role in political life. The crucial changes Gorbachev secured at the 19th Soviet Party Conference in July 1988, which were formally adopted at a landmark CPSU Central Committee plenum three months later, had the effect of eliminating or reducing the party’s ability to perform certain key tasks.⁴⁸ In par-

⁴⁶ “Doklad General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva na XIX Vsesoyuznoi konferentsii KPSS 28 iyunya 1988 god.,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 29 June 1988), 3.

⁴⁷ “Rech’ M. S. Gorbacheva na vstreche s trudyashchimisya v g. Kieve,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow, 24 February 1989), 3.

⁴⁸ “Stenogramma Plenuma TsK KPSS 30 sentyabrya 1988 god.,” Plenum Verbatim and Corrected Transcript (Secret), 30 September 1988, in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 5, Ll. 163-76. For Gorbachev’s rationale for the

ticular, Gorbachev abolished many of the CPSU Central Committee departments, including the Department for Ties with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries, whose functions were merged with an expanded International Department (ID).⁴⁹ The reconfigured ID, in turn, was placed under the jurisdiction of the new CPSU Commission on International Policy, headed by Gorbachev's close ally, Aleksandr Yakovlev, whose advocacy of "new political thinking" in Soviet foreign policy had taken an increasingly radical turn.⁵⁰ During the first few years under Gorbachev, Yakovlev had focused mostly on improving the "image" and packaging of Soviet foreign policy and on "thwarting Western counterpropaganda against the new thinking."⁵¹ But by the latter half of 1988, as events in the USSR gathered pace, Yakovlev was urging "concrete changes" of a "fundamental nature"

changes, see his memorandum transcribed in *Izvestiya TsK KPSS* (Moscow), vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1989): 81–86.

⁴⁹ Mark Kramer, "The Role of the CPSU International Department in Soviet Foreign Relations and National Security Policy," *Soviet Studies* vol. 42, no. 3 (July 1990): 429–46.

⁵⁰ "Postanovlenie Plenuma TsK KPSS: O Komissiyakh Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS," *Pravda* (Moscow, 29 November 1988), 1–2. For an overview of Gorbachev's restructuring of the CPSU and party-state relations, see Graeme Gill, *The Collapse of a Single-Party System: The Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁵¹ "O protivodeistvii Zapada politike perestroika po kanalakh propagandy," o perestroike kak faktore nezavisimosti dlya Zapada, o politicheskom razmezhevanii na Zapade v otnoshenii k perestroike v SSSR," Memorandum from A. N. Yakovlev to M. S. Gorbachev (Top Secret), 4 July 1987, in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 387, Ll. 1–12; "O kurse na aktivizatsiyu vneshnepoliticheskoi deyatel'nosti SSSR," Memorandum from A. N. Yakovlev to the CPSU Politburo (Top Secret), 11 November 1986, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 2, D. 69, Ll. 1–18; "Tekst vystupleniya A. N. Yakovleva na Politbyuro TsK KPSS v svyazi s proektom Postanovleniya TsK KPSS, vnesennym na rassmotrenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS o perspektivnykh zadachakh vneshnepoliticheskoi propagandy," Text of speech (Secret), 6 January 1987, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 243, Ll. 1–7; and "Stenogramma soveshchaniya, provedennogo A. N. Yakovlevym v TsK KPSS s rukovoditelyami informatsionnykh agentstv pechati stran sotssodruzhestva i stran sotsialisticheskoi orientatsii," Transcript of meeting with East-bloc press officials (Top Secret), 26 November 1987, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 171, Ll. 1–19.

that would “reshape [Soviet] relations with all of the socialist countries” in ways “consistent with the new directions in [Soviet] foreign policy.”⁵²

The elimination of the old CPSU department that had long coordinated intra-bloc affairs, the diffusion of the erstwhile department’s responsibilities, and the supervisory role given to Yakovlev over Soviet ties with Eastern Europe could not help but mitigate the CPSU’s entrenched habit of interfering in the activities of East European Communist parties and governments.⁵³ Thus, from an institutional standpoint, the reorganization of the Soviet central party apparatus in 1988 both contributed to and heralded the looser Soviet policy in Eastern Europe.

Genesis and Impact of Unilateral Force Reductions

Another dramatic sign of the reorientation of Gorbachev’s policy toward the Warsaw Pact countries came in December 1988 when he announced, in a landmark speech before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, that the Soviet Union would unilaterally reduce its military forces in Eastern Europe by 50,000 troops, 5,300 tanks, and 24 tactical nuclear weapons within two years.⁵⁴ This shift to major uni-

⁵² “Tezisy vystupleniya A. N. Yakovleva na Politbyuro TsK KPSS o ‘novom politicheskom myshlenii’: Kontseptsyakh prodvizheniya vpered po ryadu napravlenii postanovke konkretnykh dolgovremennykh tselei takovogo prodvizheniya, prakticheskikh sdvigakh i samykh pervykh poka eshche rezul’tatakh” (Teoreticheskii aspekt),” Revised text of speech to CPSU Politburo Session (Secret), 27 December 1988, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 190, Ll. 1–7.

⁵³ See the illuminating account by Vadim Medvedev, a close ally of Gorbachev who headed the CPSU intra-bloc department until it was abolished and then became a CPSU Politburo member, *Raspad: Kak on nazreval v “mirovoy sistemye sotsializma”* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994), esp. 117–23, 248–51.

⁵⁴ “Vystuplenie M. S. Gorbacheva v Organizatsii Ob”edinennykh Natsii,” *Pravda* (Moscow), 8 December 1988, 2. In early 1989 the U.S. intelligence community prepared a classified assessment of the impact of these cuts. The document—U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “Trends and Development in Warsaw Pact Theater Forces and Doctrine Through the

lateral reductions of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, an approach long dreaded by Soviet military officers, was particularly significant in light of the far-reaching political changes under way in the USSR, Hungary, and Poland.

The decision to reduce Soviet troops and weapons unilaterally, and the related decision about precisely which forces to eliminate, were made exclusively in Moscow. Initially, at the end of October 1988, Gorbachev met with a small group of foreign policy advisers, including Shevardnadze, Aleksandr Yakovlev, Anatolii Chernyaev, Anatolii Dobrynin, and Valentin Falin, to determine how the initiative should be conceived and presented.⁵⁵ The proposal was then fleshed out with specific numbers and discussed by the full CPSU Politburo on 10 and 24 November and 2 December.⁵⁶ The USSR Defense Council, which Gorbachev also chaired, met on 11 November to determine which Soviet forces should be weeded out and how quickly they should be withdrawn. In none of these deliberations did the East European leaders have any say or play even the slightest role. Last-minute “consultations” with the East European governments about the matter were purely pro forma. The East German leader Erich Honecker, whose country was the most heavily affected by the reductions, was informed of Gorbachev’s intentions only three days before the Soviet leader spoke at the UN.⁵⁷ According to Honecker’s former associates, he was

1990s,” *National Intelligence Estimate* (NIE) 11-14-89, February 1989 (Top Secret)—is available in slightly redacted form in CIA, Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI), *At Cold War’s End: U.S. Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989–1991* (Washington, DC: CIA 1999), Doc. 16. See also William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 146–47.

⁵⁵ “Soveschchanie po podgotovke kontseptsii vystupleniya Gorbacheva v OON,” notes taken by Anatolii Chernyaev, 31 October 1988, in KDPP, vol. 3, 491–94.

⁵⁶ “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 10 noyabrya 1988 god.,” 10 November 1988 (Top Secret), in KDPP, vol. 3, 498–509; “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 24 noyabrya 1988 god.,” 24 November 1988 (Top Secret), in KDPP, Vol. 3, 509–522; and “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 10 dekabrya 1988 god.,” 2 December 1988 (Top Secret), in KDPP, vol. 3, 524–29.

⁵⁷ “Wesentlicher Inhalt des Gesprächs des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Nationalen Verteidigungsrates der DDR, Genossen

“stunned and dismayed” by the news, but he had little choice other than to express his perfunctory endorsement.⁵⁸

The aim of the reductions, according to the resolution adopted by the CPSU Politburo, was to “accentuate the defensive character” of the Warsaw Pact, to “give new and strong impetus to the process of lowering the military-strategic balance in Europe,” and to “improve relations between East and West and facilitate the process of disarmament.”⁵⁹ This last point was especially important for Gorbachev, who viewed the unilateral cuts as the best way to achieve economic savings in the near to medium term. At a CPSU Politburo meeting a few weeks after the speech, he claimed that unless the Soviet Union curbed its military forces and defense spending, it would “never be able to sustain a long-term economic and social policy.”⁶⁰

In both military and political terms, the reductions amply fulfilled Gorbachev’s objectives. The U.S. intelligence community, which carefully tracked the implementation of Gorbachev’s projected cuts, reported in September 1989 that the withdrawals were leading to “a very significant reduction in the offensive combat power of Soviet forces in Europe” and would result in “the most significant changes in Soviet general purpose forces opposite NATO since [Nikita] Khrushchev’s

Erich Honecker, mit dem Mitglied des Politburos des ZK der SED und Minister für Nationale Verteidigung, Genossen Armeegeneral Kessler, am Sonntag, dem or. 12. 1988,” GVS-Nr. A 613 225 (Top Secret), 4 December 1988, in MA-BA, VA-01/32665, Bl. 154–60.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the comments of Heinz Kessler, *Zur Sache und zur Person: Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1996), 240–41; Hans Modrow, *Aufbruch und Ende* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur, 1991), 131; Hans Modrow, *In historischer Mission: als deutscher Politiker unterwegs* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 2007), 181; Egon Krenz, *Herbst ’89* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1999), 107; and Egon Krenz, *Wenn Mauern fallen: Die friedliche Revolution—Vorgeschichte, Ablauf-Auswirkungen* (Vienna: Paul Neff, 1990), 23–24.

⁵⁹ “Wesentlicher Inhalt des Gesprächs des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Nationalen Verteidigungsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Mitglied des Politburos des ZK der SED und Minister für Nationale Verteidigung, Genossen Armeegeneral Kessler,” Bl. 158.

⁶⁰ “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 27-28 dekabrya 1988 god: O prakticheskoi realizatsii i prakticheskom obespechenii itogov vizita t. Gorbacheva M. S. v OON,” 27-28 December 1988 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 89, Op. 42, D. 24, Ll. 1–34.

drastic force reductions of the late 1950s and early 1960s.” U.S. intelligence analysts concluded that even if the Soviet Army added infantry fighting vehicles to its units in Eastern Europe to help offset the cuts, “the loss of half the [Soviet] tanks previously stationed in Eastern Europe will significantly degrade Pact offensive capabilities.”⁶¹ In political terms as well, the impact of the reductions was enormous. Gorbachev assured the CPSU Politburo that the cuts would “show that our new political thinking is more than just words” and would signal a new Soviet approach to relations with Eastern Europe. Some members of the Soviet Politburo warned that the withdrawals would strengthen the impression that the Soviet Union would no longer provide “fraternal assistance” to the East European regimes, thus causing “undesirable consequences for the entire socialist commonwealth.”⁶² But Gorbachev was willing to accept that risk as he pressed ahead with his efforts to revive and restructure the Soviet economy, to recast Soviet foreign relations in accordance with “new political thinking,” and to transform the Warsaw Pact into a defensive alliance.

The decision to embrace unilateral reductions provoked consternation within the Soviet High Command. The very thing that Soviet marshals and generals had long been denouncing as a “dangerous,” “misguided,” and “completely unacceptable” option was now enshrined as state policy. The chief of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal Sergei Akhromeev, resigned five days before Gorbachev’s speech. Although Akhromeev at the time did not publicly disclose why he stepped down, and although he agreed to stay on temporarily as a personal military adviser to Gorbachev, he later revealed that he had been “distracted” about Gorbachev’s willingness to act without gaining reciprocity by NATO.⁶³ In Akhromeev’s view, the Soviet leader’s failure to insist on corresponding Western reductions was

⁶¹ U.S. National Intelligence Council, “Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals,” Memorandum NIC M 89 10003 (Secret), October 1989, 2, 8, reproduced in CSI, *At Cold War’s End*, Doc. 18.

⁶² “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 27-28 dekabrya 1988 god.,” L. 31.

⁶³ Interview with Akhromeev in “Deutschland, das neue Europa, und die Perestroika: Exklusivinterview mit Marschall Achromejev,” *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin, 4 October 1990), 8.

“incomprehensible” and a “betrayal.”⁶⁴ In subsequent weeks, many other high-ranking Soviet officers were dismissed, climaxing with the removal of Marshal Viktor Kulikov, the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact, and his main deputy, Army-General Anatolii Gribkov, in early February 1989. The ouster of Kulikov and Gribkov, who together had been commanding the Warsaw Pact’s joint military forces since 1977 and had publicly opposed any unilateral reductions, brought a symbolic end to the Soviet military’s attempts to preserve the Pact as a cohesive, effective alliance. From then on, Soviet officers were hoping mainly that they could salvage at least something of the organization and stave off outright collapse.

The Challenge of Coping with Drastic Change

All these developments left little doubt by the end of 1988 that Gorbachev had implicitly renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine and opened the way for far-reaching internal change in Eastern Europe. The real issue for the Soviet leader from that point on was no longer whether he should uphold the Brezhnev Doctrine, but whether he could avoid the “Khrushchev Dilemma.” That is, the problem was not whether to accept peaceful domestic change, as in Czechoslovakia in 1968, but how to prevent widespread anti-Soviet violence from breaking out, as in Hungary in 1956. Gorbachev would have found himself in an intractable situation if he had been confronted by a large-scale, violent uprising in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary. On the two previous occasions when violent rebellions threatened Soviet control over those four countries—in East Germany in 1953 and Hungary in 1956—Gorbachev’s predecessors responded by sending large numbers of Soviet troops to subdue the opposition. If a comparable crisis had erupted in the late 1980s, the pressure for Soviet military intervention would have been enormous, just as it was on Khrushchev in 1956. No matter how Gorbachev might have responded, he would have suffered grave damage. On the one

⁶⁴ S. F. Akhromeev and G. M. Kornienko, *Glazami marshala i diplomata* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1992), 187–88.

hand, if he had declined to reassert military control in the face of widespread anti-Soviet violence, his opponents within the CPSU undoubtedly would have accused him of recklessness and betrayal and would have done their best to remove him from office. On the other hand, if he had proceeded with a full-fledged invasion, the adverse effects on Soviet domestic reform and on East-West relations would have been immense, just as they were after previous Soviet crackdowns in the region.⁶⁵

Hence, Gorbachev's overriding objective was to avoid the Khrushchev Dilemma altogether. He could not afford to be confronted by a violent uprising in one of the key East European countries. Only by forestalling such a disastrous turn of events could he have any hope of moving ahead with his reform program. The problem, however, was that his very policies, by unleashing centrifugal forces within the Eastern bloc, had already made it *more* likely that a violent rebellion would occur. One of the main deterrents to popular anti-Communist uprisings in Eastern Europe after 1956 was the local populations' awareness that, if necessary, Soviet troops would intervene to restore control. Because this perceived constraint had been steadily diminishing under Gorbachev, the risk of a violent upheaval had increased commensurately.

The possibility of a violent explosion in Eastern Europe had long been apparent to prominent Soviet specialists on the region, such as Bogomolov and Dashichev. Their forebodings shaped the outlook of Shakhnazarov, Aleksandr Yakovlev, and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, all of whom played crucial advisory roles on Eastern Europe. These senior officials—and eventually Gorbachev himself—came to realize that the longer the existing structures in Eastern Europe remained in place, the greater the danger would be for the Soviet Union. A secret memorandum prepared by Shakhnazarov for Gorbachev and the CPSU Politburo in October 1988 warned that “social instability and crisis might well engulf the whole socialist world

⁶⁵ The adverse domestic repercussions of Soviet military intervention in Eastern Europe were candidly assessed by Yurii Levada in “Reaktivnaya otдача,” *Moskovskie novosti* (Moscow), 34 (20 August 1989): 7.

simultaneously.”⁶⁶ The memorandum offered a disconcerting appraisal of the situation:

There are countless signs that all the fraternal countries are plagued by basically the same problems, which are rapidly growing and intensifying. The fact that the symptoms are alike in all these countries shows that the disease is caused not by some sort of noxious virus, ... but by concrete factors rooted in the underlying economic and political model of socialism that was first developed in our country and that was then transferred, with essentially no modifications, to the countries that embarked on the socialist path in the postwar period.⁶⁷

Another of Gorbachev’s key advisers on European affairs, Vitalii Zhurkin, later recalled that the Soviet authorities had finally “faced up to the fact . . . that the authoritarian and totalitarian systems in the countries of Eastern Europe were artificial and would not last forever.”⁶⁸ If those systems had been “prolonged for another five or ten years,” Zhurkin argued, the resulting “explosions” would have been far more “destructive” and would have caused greater “destabilization” and “problems for everyone, not least for us.”⁶⁹

Thus, both the record of previous crises in Eastern Europe and the prospect that new crises would emerge in the near future had convinced Gorbachev’s advisers (and eventually Gorbachev himself) that, as Shevardnadze put it, “if positive changes [in Eastern Europe] were suppressed or delayed, the whole situation would end in tragedy.”⁷⁰ Far-reaching liberalization, they believed, was the only way to forestall such

⁶⁶ “K zasedaniyu Politbyuro 6/X-88 g.,” 6 October 1988 (Secret), in AGF, F. 5, Op. 1, Dok. 15107. The text of the memorandum is featured as an appendix in G. Kh. Shakhnazarov, *Tsena svobody: Reformatsiya Gorbacheva glazami ego pomoshchnika* (Moscow: Rossika-Zevs, 1993), 367–69 (quoted portion is from 367).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 368.

⁶⁸ Interview with Vitalii Zhurkin, adviser to Gorbachev on European affairs, in “Evropa v menyayushchikhsya koordinatakh,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 26 May 1990), 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ E. Shevardnadze, “O vneshnei politike,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 26 June 1990), 3.

crises. But Gorbachev was also aware that unless the “positive changes” they were seeking in Eastern Europe occurred peacefully, his domestic reform program—and his own political fate—would be in jeopardy.

Mindful of that dilemma, Gorbachev and his aides by late 1988 had established two basic goals for Soviet policy in Eastern Europe. First, they wanted to avoid direct Soviet military intervention at all costs. Shakhnazarov had emphasized in his memorandum to Gorbachev that “in the future, the prospect of ‘extinguishing’ crisis situations [in Eastern Europe] through military means must be completely ruled out.”⁷¹ Second, they sought to achieve a peaceful but rapid transition to a new political order in Eastern Europe. By drastically modifying the region’s political complexion, they could defuse the pressures that had given rise to violent internal crises in the past. But to ensure that the early stages of the process remained peaceful and that “positive changes” would indeed occur, the Soviet Union itself had to play an active, initiating role. Shakhnazarov in his October 1988 memorandum stressed the need for an active policy:

Some countries have followed our example or have even gone beyond us in undertaking profound reforms, but others, like the GDR, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, have still not acknowledged the need for reforms, primarily for political reasons and the current leaders’ aversion to making changes in anything. In reality, all of these countries need fundamental changes, although we cannot speak about this publicly, lest they accuse us of trying to impose perestroika on our friends. But a fact remains a fact: The obvious signs of an impending crisis demand radical reforms everywhere in the socialist world. ... Those who stubbornly refuse to heed the pressures for change are just intensifying the ills they face and are greatly complicating matters for the future. This affects us in the most direct way. Even if we are not authorized to be an “elder brother” in the socialist world, we cannot reject the role of a leader, a role that objectively belongs to the Soviet Union as the most powerful socialist country. If the situation were to reach a crisis point in one or more socialist coun-

⁷¹ “K zasedaniyu Politbyuro 6/X-88 g.,” L. 1.

tries, we would have to come to their rescue at the cost of enormous material, political, and even human losses.⁷²

The basic problem, as Shakhnazarov indicated, was that if most of the East European Communist parties had been left to their own devices, they would have sought to avoid reforms indefinitely and to crack down harshly on protests and discontent. In late 1988 and the first few months of 1989, Gorbachev and his aides considered how to escape this predicament. Their discussions paved the way for landmark decisions in March 1989 that prefigured the USSR's responses to mass unrest in Eastern Europe later that year.

The Decision to Abandon Soviet Military Hegemony in Eastern Europe

Gorbachev's efforts to decide how to forestall or at least cope with the Khrushchev Dilemma came to a head in the first few months of 1989 when, at his behest, the CPSU Politburo and Soviet Defense Council endorsed crucial guidelines about how the Soviet Union should respond to possible internal upheavals in Eastern Europe. In effect, Gorbachev persuaded the Politburo and Defense Council to join with him in deciding well in advance that the Soviet Union would not take military action in Eastern Europe, even if the Communist governments there collapsed. Gorbachev thus ensured that his colleagues in the Politburo and Defense Council—the only people who potentially could get rid of him—bore equal responsibility for this momentous decision and had no basis for moving against him if he declined to authorize military repression in the face of widespread destabilizing unrest in Eastern Europe. By forging a high-level consensus not to use military force, Gorbachev preemptively defused the Khrushchev Dilemma.

The process began on 24 January 1989, when Gorbachev received a memorandum from one of his top aides, Vadim Zagladin, who said he wanted to “draw [the Soviet leader's] attention to a delicate and complicated matter that could take on immense significance

⁷² Ibid., Ll. 1–2.

for us.”⁷³ Zagladin averred that the Soviet Union’s “new military-political thinking” necessitated a “painstaking review of our obligations regarding the provision of military assistance to foreign states in extreme circumstances.” The phrase “extreme circumstances” (*chrezvychainye obstoyatel'stva*), which could also be translated as “an emergency” in English, clearly referred not only to external military attack by NATO (which was deemed unlikely by this time) but also to a severe internal crisis, including the downfall of the Communist regime. Zagladin warned that as long as the Soviet Union’s existing obligations remained intact, “extreme circumstances might compel us to take actions that could halt and even totally negate what we have achieved” through the embrace of “new political thinking.” He argued that “obligations undertaken amid the circumstances of the Cold War ... have sharply constrained [the Soviet Union’s] freedom of action,” and he expressed particular anxiety about “unpublished and, for the most part, tightly held documents regarding certain understandings that could potentially create severe difficulties for us.” Zagladin said that in the future the Soviet Union must always “approach this issue from the perspective of new military-political thinking,” which presumably would bring the elimination of “outdated commitments.” In his view, the best way to “begin [is] by thoroughly analyzing *all* obligations we have undertaken that involve military assistance of any sort.”⁷⁴

Gorbachev promptly authorized Zagladin to coordinate an in-depth, high-level review of the matter that would offer recommendations for the CPSU Politburo. On 27 January, Zagladin sent a note to senior officials responsible for foreign policy and national security, asking them to work together in compiling a critical appraisal of “the USSR’s current obligations to provide military assistance to foreign countries, including under extreme circumstances.”⁷⁵ Top experts from the Soviet Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry, with input from a few other ministries and agencies, jointly produced a detailed study

⁷³ “Dokladnaya zapiska o peresmotre obyazatel'stv po okazaniyu voennoi pomoshchi,” Memorandum from V. Zagladin to Mikhail Gorbachev (Secret), 24 January 1989, in AGF, F. 3, Dok. 7179, Ll. 1–3.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Ll. 2–3 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁵ “Zapiska,” from V. Zagladin to E. Shevardnadze, D. Yazov, and V. Kamentsev, 27 January 1989, in AGF, F. 3, Dok. 7179a., L. 1, with attachment.

of major aspects of the issue that in effect repudiated the Soviet government's earlier interpretations of its multilateral obligations under the Warsaw Treaty and its bilateral obligations to each of the East European countries.

On 25 March 1989 Gorbachev received a 10-page memorandum from Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Defense Minister Army-General Dmitrii Yazov, and State Foreign Economic Commission Chairman Vladimir Kamentsev, summarizing the findings of the review and laying out a series of far-reaching recommendations.⁷⁶ The memorandum noted that "the extreme circumstances that might trigger the provision of military assistance [to a Warsaw Pact country] pertain only to foreign threats, that is, situations when the right to individual or collective self-defense is carried out in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter." The document said that even "in the case of an armed attack" from outside, the "relevant provisions" in the Warsaw Treaty regarding collective defense were "flexible and did not automatically require the provision of military assistance." The Soviet Union's bilateral treaties with East European countries were "more definite" in calling for "the immediate provision of all manner of assistance, including military aid," but this was true only when "needed to defend against external armed attack."⁷⁷

Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev stressed that "internal situations in the [Warsaw Pact] countries ... do not fall into the category" of contingencies covered by the Warsaw Treaty or by the bilateral defense treaties linking the Soviet Union with individual Warsaw Pact states "and therefore do not require us to take any sorts of measures in con-

⁷⁶ "Tovarishchu Gorbachevu M. S.," Memorandum No. 242/OS (Top Secret) to M. S. Gorbachev from E. Shevardnadze, D. Yazov, and V. Kamentsev, 25 March 1989, in Hoover Archives (Stanford University), Papers of Vitalii Leonidovich Kataev, Box 13, Folder 14, 1–10. Vitalii Kataev was deputy head of the CPSU Defense Industry Department (renamed Defense Department in 1991) during the Gorbachev era and served as an adviser to the CPSU General Secretary on military issues, arms control, and weapons production. Before he died in 2001, he and his daughter had arranged for copies of his papers to be transferred to the Hoover Institution, which acquired them in 2002. Five of the twenty boxes of papers have not yet been released, but all the rest are accessible.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

nection with our treaty obligations.” The memorandum noted that “two of the [Soviet Union’s bilateral] treaties—those with Czechoslovakia and the GDR—contain clauses about the defense of people’s socialist gains,” and the three Soviet officials acknowledged that these clauses “are construed in the West as codifying a right to the collective defense of socialism, including the use of military force, against internal as well as external threats.” This was indeed the way Western observers had always interpreted those clauses in the two treaties, and it was also the way Soviet leaders had construed them prior to 1989. Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev argued that such interpretations were invalid and that “the language in the [USSR’s bilateral treaties with the GDR and Czechoslovakia] is in fact very general and does not in any way stipulate that military assistance must be provided.”⁷⁸

The three officials argued that “the phrasing of the Warsaw Treaty concerning the provision of military assistance is adequate for the current situation in the world and does not require any sorts of changes to be introduced.” They added that

although the obligations contained in the USSR’s bilateral treaties with allied states are formulated more strictly and could be construed in ways undesirable for us, it would not be appropriate for us to take the initiative in suggesting modifications or a reexamination of the treaties, in light of the travails being experienced by these states and the complex processes under way in them. Such an initiative might result in a weakening of allied relations and exacerbate the centrifugal trends in the [socialist] community and facilitate the destabilization of the situation in several of the countries.⁷⁹

The memorandum went on to say that “if the question of reexamining a bilateral treaty is raised by the allied state itself, as is now being done by Bulgaria, then of course we should pursue the task of clarifying the treaty’s terms, albeit without detriment to the allied obligations laid out therein.” The three officials said that “concretely what we have

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

in mind is to include in a new bilateral treaty the phrasing that now appears in the Warsaw Treaty regarding the provision of [Soviet] military assistance" to a country under attack.⁸⁰

Zagladin's original memorandum to Gorbachev on 24 January had proposed that "after carrying out a review [of the USSR's military obligations] and taking account of the results of this review, we could consider raising this matter in strict confidence with the American side."⁸¹ Gorbachev did not reject the idea, and Zagladin subsequently recommended to Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev that the Soviet Union "should discuss with the American side on a confidential basis [the USSR's] obligations concerning the provision of military assistance to allies." The implication was that they should privately let U.S. officials know that the Soviet Union would no longer be coming to the aid of East European regimes faced with severe internal crises. Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev said they found Zagladin's proposal to be of "dubious merit," not only because "the USA would promptly inform its allies about such discussions" but also because the confidential discussions "inevitably would be leaked to the press and we would appear in the eyes of our allies to be conspiring behind their backs with the Americans regarding our obligations to our allies. The political effect of this [in Eastern Europe] would be extremely negative." Although Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev expressed strong support for "the further positive development of the Soviet-American dialogue," they warned against explicitly taking up such sensitive matters with the U.S. government and argued that Soviet officials should instead discuss in a more general way with their American counterparts how the two sides could "constructively approach the regulation of concrete problems that currently exist or could arise in different regions of the world."⁸²

Even though Zagladin's proposal was not ultimately adopted, the mere fact that he suggested it underscores the firmness of the Soviet Union's decision to avoid the use of military force in Eastern Europe and illustrates how much the international context of Soviet-East

⁸⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁸¹ "Dokladnaya zapiska o peresmotre obyazatel'stv po okazaniyu voennoi pomoshchi," Ll. 3.

⁸² "Tovarishchu Gorbachevu M. S." (see note 74 *supra*), 9.

European relations had changed during the Gorbachev era. In the past, especially during the halcyon days of U.S. “rollback” and “liberation” policies in the 1950s, the zero-sum nature of the Cold War rivalry would have caused Soviet leaders to fear that even the slightest relaxation of Soviet control in Eastern Europe would be exploited by the United States.⁸³ No Soviet official prior to the late 1980s would ever have suggested holding confidential discussions with the United States about Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe. Since 1985, however, the rapid improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations had given Soviet leaders ample confidence that the United States was no longer trying to undermine Moscow’s vital political-military interests in Eastern Europe.

Indeed, this very matter had come up explicitly in bilateral talks in mid-January 1989 (shortly before Zagladin sent his memorandum to Gorbachev), when former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger traveled to Moscow unofficially on behalf of the Trilateral Commission with the knowledge and quiet blessing of the incoming administration of George H. W. Bush.⁸⁴ Kissinger’s confidential discussions with Gorbachev and Yakovlev focused on, among other things, Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe in the context of U.S.-Soviet relations. In a conversation with Yakovlev, Kissinger proposed that senior U.S. and Soviet officials begin a secret “political dialogue” that would help to promote “political evolution” in Eastern Europe in an orderly way, eliminating the “potential for instability.” The aim would be to defuse the “dangerously volatile conditions” in the region and to avert any “political explosions.” Kissinger reported that he had “discussed this matter in detail with G. Bush’s entourage,” and that “the incoming U.S. administration would be ready to discuss these questions in a confidential format” while “taking full account of [the USSR’s] legitimate

⁸³ See, for example, Khrushchev’s comments in late October 1956 about the U.S. government’s malevolent designs vis-à-vis Hungary, cited in Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 33, no. 2 (April 1998): 191.

⁸⁴ On the Kissinger-Gorbachev talks, see Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995), 190–92.

security interests” in Eastern Europe.⁸⁵ Gorbachev promptly surmised, as he later told the CPSU Politburo, that Kissinger was in effect advocating “a U.S.-Soviet condominium in Europe”—a largely accurate characterization of Kissinger’s intention (though not necessarily of any measures the incoming Bush administration would have been willing to embrace in public).⁸⁶

Although Gorbachev clearly welcomed Kissinger’s proposal, he expressed concern that it would give the impression of “an attempt at collusion between the USSR and the USA at the expense of Europe.” When Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev turned down Zagladin’s proposal, the reasons they cited were not that the United States was hellbent on fomenting or taking advantage of turmoil in Eastern Europe. Instead, the problem, as they (and Gorbachev) saw it, was the opposite: namely, that relations between the United States and Soviet Union had warmed so much over the past few years that East European leaders would be inclined to suspect that U.S. and Soviet officials were conniving behind the backs of the East European governments to promote the superpowers’ common interest in the region’s fate. The far-reaching improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations was thus conducive to innovative Soviet actions vis-à-vis Eastern Europe—actions that would have been inconceivable at any previous stage of the Cold War.

The Push for Far-Reaching Change and the Impact of Tiananmen

After forging a high-level consensus that the Soviet Union would not use military force to suppress internal upheavals in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and his aides still faced the challenge of ensuring that what Shakhnazarov’s memorandum in October 1988 had described

⁸⁵ “Zapis’ besedy A. N. Yakovleva s G. Kissindzherom (SShA) 16 yanvarya 1989 g. po mezhdunarodnym problemam,” Summary Transcript of conversation (Secret), 17 January 1989, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 258, Ll. 1–5.

⁸⁶ “Zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS, 24 yanvarya 1989 god.,” Transcript of CPSU Politburo Session (Top Secret), 24 January 1989, in AGF, F. 10, Op. 2, Ll. 198–99.

as the “fundamental changes” and “radical reforms needed everywhere” in the region would occur peacefully. This question took on particular urgency in the spring and summer of 1989 amid a surge of unrest in the USSR itself, including fighting between Azerbaijanis and Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh and mass demonstrations in Tbilisi that were crushed by the Soviet Army in April 1989. The violent suppression of the disturbances in Tbilisi, killing 19 people and wounding nearly 300, was implemented locally without Gorbachev’s authorization and against his expressed wishes. Both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze promptly disavowed and condemned the operation, pledging that “this sort of tragedy will never be allowed to happen again.”⁸⁷ Even though Gorbachev was increasingly preoccupied by instability at home and other pressing domestic issues, the growing restiveness in several Soviet republics reinforced his desire to prevent violent turmoil from erupting along the USSR’s western flank.

Because far-reaching liberalization was already under way in Hungary and Poland, the main task for Soviet officials in those two countries was to encourage continued progress and to dispel any doubt that the Soviet Union would stand in the way of drastic change there. Even when the Hungarian government moved well ahead of the USSR itself in reassessing the 1956 Hungarian revolution and other sensitive issues in bilateral Soviet-Hungarian relations, Soviet leaders refrained from hindering the process.⁸⁸ The ceremonial reburial in June 1989 of Imre Nagy, the reformist prime minister who returned to power at

⁸⁷ For a full account and evidence from declassified sources, see Mark Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 2),” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 64 (Fall 2004): 27–32.

⁸⁸ Until October 1991, by which time the Soviet regime was in its terminal phase, Gorbachev never criticized the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 or reassessed the Hungarian revolution. As late as March 1989, in a private conversation with Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh, Gorbachev argued that the unrest in Hungary in October 1956 had “deteriorated into counterrevolution and bloodshed,” and he expressed disapproval of attempts in Hungary to characterize the revolution as a “popular uprising.” See “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenom TsK VSRP, Predsedatelem Soveta Ministrov VNR Mikloshem Nemetom, 3 marta 1989,” Notes of Conversation (Top Secret), 3 March 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 8325, L. 3.

the height of the 1956 revolution and was then executed and buried in an unmarked grave in June 1958 after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956, leading to the installation of a new government headed by János Kádár, was the culmination of a series of key events in 1989 linked with Hungary's efforts to come to terms with the 1956 revolution and the forceful suppression of it by Soviet troops.⁸⁹

On 15 June, the day before the re-interment of Nagy, a small demonstration occurred in front of the Soviet embassy in Budapest. The next day, more than 250,000 people turned out for the ceremony, which featured emotional and often fiery speeches (including some with a distinctly anti-Soviet tinge), marking a turning point in Hungary's democratization. Official Soviet commentary on the reburial referred to it as a "humane act" undertaken "in the spirit of national reconciliation"—a striking contrast to the furious reaction that such an event (or anything remotely like it) would have provoked in Moscow under previous Soviet leaders.⁹⁰ Soviet officials were even willing to forgo any criticism of the anti-Soviet comments voiced by some orators at the reburial, describing these as merely Hungary's "internal affair."

In Poland from late 1988 on, Gorbachev and his aides had to take a more active role than in Hungary as they nudged along the process of change and ensured that the Polish regime headed by Wojciech Jaruzelski would not try to backtrack and end the liberalizing reforms.⁹¹ Soviet leaders encouraged the re-legalization of Solidarity, the convocation of Round Table talks between Solidarity and the Communist regime, and the arrangement to hold partly free elections for a new Polish legislature. As far back as September 1988, Gorbachev had told a senior PZPR official, Józef Czyrek, that the Polish Communists would lose out in the Round Table unless they finally "took account of real-

⁸⁹ Mark Kramer, "Beyond the Brezhnev Doctrine: A New Era in Soviet-East European Relations," *International Security* vol. 14, no. 3 (Winter 1989–1990): 44–45.

⁹⁰ Vladimir V. Kusin, "Hard-Line Response to Imre Nagy Reburial and Intensification of Hungarian Reforms," RAD Background Report 115 (Eastern Europe), *Radio Free Europe Research*, (29 June 1989), 1–10.

⁹¹ For a detailed discussion of the Soviet Union's role vis-à-vis the changes in Poland, see Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 178–256.

ities [in Polish society] that cannot be ignored” and stopped “acting out of fear.” Gorbachev sensed that because the PZPR had “wasted so much time,” the party would find it hard to “cope with the prominence and broad popularity of the opposition.”⁹² Whenever Jaruzelski or other senior Polish Communist officials expected (or hoped) that the Soviet Union might try to curtail the liberalization, Soviet leaders did just the opposite, pushing the authorities to compromise with Solidarity and signaling approval of any outcome that might emerge.

In the four other Warsaw Pact countries—Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania—the Communist regimes had staunchly eschewed any hint of liberalization and had, if anything, become increasingly repressive and intransigent as the internal and external pressures for reform grew. Leading officials in those countries were heartened in early June 1989 when the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ordered a brutal attack by army troops and security forces against a vast crowd of unarmed people around Tiananmen Square in Beijing, bringing an end to several weeks of protests.

The crisis in Beijing had begun in mid-April 1989 when a fledgling “pro-democracy” movement coalesced in Tiananmen Square, inspired in part by the death of the ousted CCP leader Hu Yaobang (who had been removed in 1987 after seeking to move ahead with political liberalization) and also by the rapid changes under way in the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Poland. Mass demonstrations spread to Shanghai, Harbin, Chengdu, Nanjin, and other cities in China, but the primary focus both for the Chinese regime and for the international community was the unrest in Beijing. Several weeks of peaceful if boisterous protests ensued by vast throngs of students, young workers, peasants, and other people in and around Tiananmen Square.⁹³

⁹² “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s Sekretarem TsK PORP Yu. Chirekom,” Notes from Conversation (Secret), 23 September 1988, in AGF, F. 10, Op. 2, Dok. 0097.

⁹³ For varying perspectives on the Tiananmen Square crisis, see Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Yu. M. Galenovich, *Protivostoyanie: Pekin, Tyan’an’men’, 1989*

Hunger strikes by students starting in mid-May drew particularly wide notice both at home and abroad. The CCP General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, wanted to pursue a genuine compromise with the demonstrators and to introduce broad political reforms, but he was unable to win support from his colleagues in the CCP Politburo.⁹⁴ Although one senior official, Hu Qili, did side with Zhao, the two of them were outflanked by eight party elders led by Deng Xiaoping, who warned that “if things continue this way, we could even end up under house

god., 3 vols. (Moscow: Institut Dal’nego Vostoka, 1995); Thomas Reichenbach, *Die Demokratiebewegung in China 1989: Die Mobilisierung durch Studentenorganisationen in Beijing* (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1994); Kasymzhomart Tokaev, *Kak eto bylo: Khronika volnenii v Pekine, aprel’-iyun’ 1989* (Almaty: SP ‘Diana,’ 1994); and the useful compendium of essays and documents edited by Ruth Cremerius, Doris Fischer, and Peter Schier, *Studentenprotest und Repression in China, April-Juni 1989: Analyse, Chronologie, Dokumente* (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1990).

⁹⁴ Zhao Ziyang’s invaluable memoir, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang*, trans. and ed. by Bao Pu, Renee Chiang, and Adi Ignatius (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), esp. 3–49, offers a fascinating perspective on the events of 1989 in China. His memoir amply corroborates the collection of notes from the deliberations of Chinese Communist leaders in April–June 1989 published by Andrew Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership’s Decision to Use Force Against Their Own People* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001). Although the exact provenance of these notes is still uncertain, Zhao Ziyang’s memoir dispels lingering doubts about their authenticity. The notes, like Zhao’s memoir, show that Zhao spoke strongly in favor of a political compromise at sessions of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee on 13, 16, and 17 May 1989, but Deng Xiaoping left no doubt that he fundamentally disagreed with Zhao. See Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 147–52, 177–81, and 184–49. From then on, Zhao’s ouster was only a matter of time (He was demoted on 20 May and then replaced altogether by Jiang Zemin shortly after the crackdown.) When reading Zhao’s comments nowadays about the need to “use the methods of democracy and law” in accommodating the protesters, one cannot help but be struck by the similarity to the policies advocated in the late 1980s and early 1990s by leading Soviet “new thinkers” such as Yakovlev and Shakhnazarov. By contrast, the staunch hardliners on the Chinese Politburo in 1989, particularly Wang Zhen and Li Peng, were similar in their outlooks to the ultra-hardliners in Moscow, such as Oleg Baklanov and General Valentin Varennikov, both of whom were instrumental in the attempted coup in August 1991.

arrest.”⁹⁵ Other Politburo members expressed strong support of Deng’s views, arguing that any “retreat” in the face of such an audacious challenge would lead to the “destruction of the People’s Republic” and the “overthrow of our party and government.”⁹⁶ Loudest of all in calling for a massive crackdown was Wang Zhen, a staunch hardliner on the CCP Politburo, who described the protesters as “goddamn bastards” and declared that the army should “show them no mercy.” At Deng’s behest, the CCP Politburo approved “decisive measures to put down the counterrevolutionary riot” in Beijing and authorized the “use of any means necessary to remove people who interfere with this mission.”⁹⁷

On the evening of 3–4 June, cordons of troops from the 27th Group Army Unit and special-purpose security forces moved into the center of Beijing and clashed with demonstrators at numerous points around Tiananmen Square. The troops then surrounded the area and repeatedly opened fire on serried crowds of protesters, killing more than a thousand and wounding at least several thousand.⁹⁸ Tens of

⁹⁵ Comments by Deng at meeting of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee on 17 May 1989, in Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 189. See also Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 43–45.

⁹⁶ Comments by Deng Yingchao, Chen Yun, and Wang Zhen at an enlarged meeting of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee on 18 May 1989, in Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 204–11.

⁹⁷ Transcript of an enlarged session of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee on 2 June 1989, *ibid.*, 355–62.

⁹⁸ The precise number killed and wounded is as yet unknown and may never be known. Based on a canvass of major hospitals in Beijing, the Chinese Red Cross concluded that 2,600 civilians and troops were killed and more than 7,000 were wounded. In a secret cable to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker on 22 June 1989, the U.S. embassy in Beijing described the Chinese Red Cross’s figures as “not an unreasonable estimate” but noted that the totals “do not include [unrecorded] deaths on the streets.” See “What Happened on the Night of June 3/4?” Cable No. 1411 (Confidential), 22 June 1989, in George Bush Presidential Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, Subject File: China Documents, FOIA Documents Collection 2000-0950-F, Doc. E44. Other estimates—some lower, some higher—also have been proposed, but no firm corroboration is yet available. Apparently no one was killed in Tiananmen Square itself because President Yang Shangkun (on behalf of Deng Xiaoping) had ordered the troops not to open fire there. The crackdown occurred at many key sites around the square, ranging up to a kilometer away.

thousands of other protesters were arrested over the next few days on charges of “counterrevolutionary rioting.”

The sweeping crackdown in the Chinese capital offered mixed lessons for Communist party leaders in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the crisis illustrated the potential efficacy of all-out force against internal unrest. The massacre and systematic arrests of “lawless elements and counterrevolutionary ring-leaders” in Beijing put an abrupt end to the escalating protests in China and allowed the Chinese Communist authorities to reestablish tight control. The decisive crackdown was seen by some hardliners in Moscow—and, even more, by orthodox Communist leaders in Eastern Europe, who spoke appreciatively of the “Chinese solution”—as a model for the sort of large-scale repressive actions that might soon be needed in most of the Warsaw Pact countries if mass unrest there continued to grow.⁹⁹

On the other hand, the repression in China had a jarring effect on many high-ranking Soviet officials, including Gorbachev, who by all accounts was taken aback and dismayed by the scale of the bloodshed.¹⁰⁰ The massacre came less than three weeks after Gorbachev had made a landmark visit to China, the first such visit by a Soviet leader

⁹⁹ East German and Romanian Communist leaders were especially enthusiastic about the “Chinese solution.” See, for example, the text of a secret speech delivered on 9 June by East German State Security Minister Erich Mielke, reproduced in “Krenz und Mielke vereinbarten auf Geheimkonferenz chinesische Lösung,” *Die Welt* (Hamburg, 21 May 1990), 6. See also the secret deliberations recorded in “‘Chinesische Lösung’: Wollten Stasi-Leute ein Blutbad unter Demonstranten provozieren?” *Der Spiegel* 51 (Hamburg, 18 December 1989), 42–44; Ewald König, “Der Honecker-Befehl zum Blutbad war am 9. Oktober schön unter geschrieben,” *Die Presse* (Vienna, 24 November 1989), 4; and the two-part article by Cordt Schnibben, “‘Ich bin das Volk’: Wie Erich Honecker und sein Politbüro die Konterrevolution erlebten (I),” *Der Spiegel* no. 16 (Hamburg, 16 April 1990): 72–90; and “‘Makkaroni mit Schinken, bitte’: Wie Erich Honecker und sein Politbüro die Konterrevolution erlebten (II),” *Der Spiegel* no. 17 (Hamburg, 23 April 1990): 78–98.

¹⁰⁰ The jarring effect that the Tiananmen crackdown had in Moscow in 1989 was emphasized by Shakhnazarov, Yakovlev, and Chernyaev in several interviews with the author in Moscow, 14 March and 7 May 1998 (Shakhnazarov), 10 June 2001 (Chernyaev), and 21–22 January 2003 (Yakovlev).

in thirty years. When the protests began in Beijing in April 1989, the Chinese authorities had hoped that they would soon peter out and that the demonstrators would be gone from Tiananmen Square by the time Gorbachev arrived on 15 May.¹⁰¹ Far from diminishing, however, the protests—and foreign press coverage of them—increased sharply in the leadup to Gorbachev’s visit, which itself attracted even greater publicity to the demonstrations. Although Chinese officials who coordinated the Soviet delegation’s itinerary tried to keep Gorbachev away from Tiananmen Square, the overflowing crowds there rapturously welcomed his presence in Beijing, believing that he shared their aims and would be able to convince the Chinese authorities to negotiate with them. The demonstrators held up large photographs of Gorbachev alongside placards exclaiming “We salute the messenger of democracy!”¹⁰² Gorbachev’s statement during a public appearance that economic reform would work only if accompanied by broad democratization (a view championed by Zhao Ziyang, whom Gorbachev regarded as a like-minded leader in Beijing) struck a particular chord of approval among the protesters.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Zhao Ziyang’s memoir and the records of CCP Politburo meetings published by Nathan and Link bear out much of the analysis in a secret, 16-page report issued by the CIA three months after the crackdown, *The Road to the Tiananmen Crackdown: An Analytic Chronology of Chinese Leadership Decision Making*, EA 89-10030 (Confidential/No Foreign Distribution), September 1989, declassified in March 2000, available in NARA/CREST. Some of the dates and details in the CIA report are off, but the thrust of the report and many specific details hold up surprisingly well against the newly released evidence.

¹⁰² The account here is drawn from Novosti television evening news broadcasts on 15, 16, and 17 May 1989 (program videotapes stored at Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University) as well as from descriptions of Gorbachev’s trip in *Ekho planety* (Moscow) vol. 22, no. 61 (25 May 1989): 21–22, and press coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Financial Times* (London), and *Le Monde* (Paris).

¹⁰³ On Gorbachev’s highly favorable assessment of Zhao Ziyang, as well as other interesting details about the Soviet delegation’s arrival, see “Informatsiya M. S. Gorbacheva o poezdke v Kitai,” Report to the CPSU Politburo (Top Secret), 20 May 1989, and “Razgovor Gorbacheva (po telefonu iz Pekina) s Medvedevym, 15 maya 1989 god.,” Notes from Telephone Conversation, 15 May 1989, both in KDPP vol. 4, 392–93 and 391–92, respectively.

Two days after arriving in Beijing, Gorbachev was asked at a news conference what he would do if confronted by large-scale demonstrations in Moscow comparable to those taking place in the Chinese capital. He replied that “if problems of this sort or of a similar nature were to occur in the Soviet Union, we would analyze their specific features and seek political methods of resolving them.” He praised the efforts that Chinese leaders (or at least Zhao Ziyang individually) were making to initiate a “constructive dialogue” with the demonstrators.¹⁰⁴ Although Gorbachev stressed that his comments were not intended as “advice to the Chinese people [sic] about how they should act in this specific situation,” and although he believed that the Chinese authorities were justified in trying to restore order and tranquility in the capital, he made clear throughout his visit that he supported “political processes and political solutions,” not mass bloodshed.¹⁰⁵

After Gorbachev returned to Moscow on 18 May, he had to focus on important sessions of the Soviet parliament and the CPSU Central Committee. Nonetheless, his trip to China continued to reverberate in both China and the USSR. On 21 May, tens of thousands of pro-democracy activists in Moscow held a rally calling for bolder reforms and expressing fervent admiration of the protesters in China. Cries of “Long live the demonstrators on the streets of Beijing!” earned thunderous applause at the rally. By this point, however, Gorbachev’s foreign policy advisers sensed that the situation in China was taking a turn for the worse.¹⁰⁶ On 20 May, Prime Minister Li Peng had declared martial law and brought armed soldiers into central Beijing, and this was soon followed by indications that Zhao Ziyang (with whom Gorbachev had developed a special rapport during his visit) had been stripped of all his functions. In light of the growing uncertainty about events in China, the official Soviet media featured restrained

¹⁰⁴ “Press-konferentsiya M. S. Gorbacheva v Pekine,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 18 May 1989), 3. The dilemma facing Gorbachev during the trip is well captured in Palazhchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze*, 134–8.

¹⁰⁵ On the Chinese leaders’ reaction to Gorbachev’s visit, see especially the comments at meetings of the Chinese Politburo on 16 and 17 May 1989, transcribed in Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 180–98.

¹⁰⁶ See the diary entry for 21 May 1989 in A. Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod: Dnevnik dvukh epokh, 1972–1991 gody* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 795–98.

(though generally favorable) coverage of the protests in Tiananmen Square in the final week of May and first few days of June.¹⁰⁷ To the extent that Soviet leaders were monitoring events abroad, their attention was focused mostly on Poland, where partly free legislative elections were slated to be held on 4 June.

As it turned out, the 4th of June was also the day of the massacre in Beijing. Shakhnazarov, Yakovlev, and Anatolyi Chernyaev later recalled that when Gorbachev learned about the harshness of the crackdown in China and the high death toll, coming so soon after his visit, he was “shocked,” “nearly speechless,” and “shaken.”¹⁰⁸ Yakovlev remembered being “appalled” at the violence and said that he and Gorbachev “realized right away that the methods they used in China were exactly what we [in Moscow] had to avoid.”¹⁰⁹ Gorbachev’s interpreter, Pavel Palazhchenko, likewise recalled that both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze found the massacre “abhorrent” but were in a “real quandary” about how to respond.¹¹⁰ Gorbachev had concurred with the Chinese leaders’ goal of restoring order in Beijing and avoiding “chaos and social upheaval,” but in his view the price they paid in achieving it was so onerous that it would be wholly unacceptable if replicated in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union itself. The number killed in Beijing was at least 50 to 100 times greater than in Tbilisi in April 1989, an event that had caused weeks of intense controversy and anguish in the USSR and recriminations against the Soviet Army.

Televised images of the carnage in China in early June, juxtaposed with news from Poland that Solidarity had won an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections (gaining all but one of the 261 seats it was allowed to contest), reinforced the widespread belief in Moscow that urgent steps were needed to forestall a cycle of violent unrest and repression in Eastern Europe that might escalate and lead to a Tiananmen-

¹⁰⁷ For a very useful analysis, see Alexander Lukin, “The Initial Soviet Reaction to the Events in China in 1989 and the Prospects for Sino-Soviet Relations,” *The China Quarterly* 125 (March 1991): 119–36.

¹⁰⁸ See the interviews adduced in note 100 *supra*.

¹⁰⁹ Interview by the author with Yakovlev, in Moscow, 21–22 January 2003.

¹¹⁰ Pavel Palazhchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 137–38.

style crackdown. The broadcasts from China also coincided with live television coverage of the newly opened session of the Soviet parliament. Gorbachev did not want strong criticism of China to be voiced in public at the parliament, and he turned off the microphone when Andrei Sakharov started giving a speech denouncing the massacre and calling for the Soviet ambassador in Beijing to be withdrawn in protest.¹¹¹ Sakharov also organized a group of parliamentary deputies to issue a statement publicly condemning the mass killing in China and “urging the Chinese government to stop the bloodshed now.”¹¹² In Hungary, too, senior officials expressed “great shock and indignation” at the “massacre” and “deeply condemned the use of military force and terror against unarmed crowds.” Thousands of ordinary Hungarians took part in a protest rally in front of the Chinese embassy in Budapest, with the Hungarian government’s tacit consent. The demonstrators voiced “outrage” at the “bloodbath” perpetrated by “mass murderers.”¹¹³

Although Gorbachev and his advisers did not join in the public criticism of the Chinese regime in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the Soviet leader did soon afterward address the Soviet parliament in public about “our reaction to the well-known events in Beijing.” He tactfully but firmly rejected the approach used by the Chinese authorities and the consequences that ensued:

We have expressed our attitude to the tragedy that happened in Beijing [on 4 June]. We deplore that it turned out that way. We are in favor of having the most acute problems solved solely

¹¹¹ Sakharov’s speech on 7 June was excluded from the proceedings published in *Izvestiya* the next day, but the full text was put out as a brochure by the Inter-Regional Group in mid-June 1989. Soon thereafter, the American lawyer Edward Kline, a long-time champion of Sakharov’s defense of human rights, translated the full text of the speech and published it as Andrei Sakharov, “A Speech to the People’s Congress,” *The New York Review of Books* vol. 36, no. 13 (17 August 1989): 30–31.

¹¹² “Obrashchenie Mezhhregional’noi gruppoi narodnykh deputatov (iyunya 1989 g.),” 9 June 1989, reproduced in A. D. Sakharov, *Vospominaniya: V dvukh tomakh* 2 vols. (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 1996), vol. 2, 574.

¹¹³ Alfred Reisch, “Hungarian Government and Party Condemn Use of Military Force in China,” RAD Background Report No. 119 (Hungary), *Radio Free Europe Research*, 30 June 1989, 1–6.

through political dialogue between the authorities and the people. This is what we believe. Such is the method we have chosen for ourselves. Each people solves its problems in its own way, but [reliance on dialogue] is our principled and, I believe, irreversible position.”¹¹⁴

Even though Gorbachev’s public criticism of the Tiananmen Square massacre was not as strong as the speech delivered by Sakharov, the Soviet leader’s comments left no doubt that he viewed the bloodshed as a “tragic” blunder. Far from seeing the Tiananmen Square crackdown as a model for what should be done in the Soviet bloc, Gorbachev and other high-ranking Soviet officials, especially Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, and Shakhnazarov, regarded it as something to avoid in Eastern Europe (and the USSR) at all costs.

The Tiananmen Square crackdown thus accelerated the trends that had been shaping Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe since late 1988. The brutal repression in China, and the widespread condemnation it evoked around the world, reinforced the decision the CPSU Politburo had taken a few months earlier to eschew any Soviet military responses to internal crises in Eastern Europe. Equally important, the traumatic example of the mass unrest and violent reaction in Beijing impelled Gorbachev to strive more actively in the latter half of 1989 to promote peaceful, far-reaching liberalization in Eastern Europe.

Contending with Hardline Regimes

Even if Gorbachev and other senior officials in Moscow saw the massacre in China as a reason to push ahead with democratizing reforms in Eastern Europe and the USSR, the “lesson” drawn by the leaders of East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania was just the opposite—namely, that any move toward political liberalization would be dangerous and that large-scale violent repression, as in China, would

¹¹⁴ “Vystuplenie M. S. Gorbacheva na pervoi sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR po itogam vizitov v Velikobritaniyu, Federativnuyu Respubliku Germanii i vo Frantsiyu i ob uchastii v soveshchanii PKK gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo Dogovora,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 2 August 1989), 2.

enable them to crush any opposition that might emerge. But even the most hardline officials in those countries were aware that any attempt they might make in the future to emulate the Tiananmen Square crackdown—if the need should arise—would require at least tacit Soviet approval and probably direct backing.

Gorbachev was well aware that Communist leaders in East Berlin, Prague, and Bucharest were alarmed by what was going on in Hungary, Poland, and the USSR and were determined to avoid any movement in that direction themselves. Shakhnazarov had argued in his October 1988 memorandum that the East German, Czechoslovak, and Romanian authorities were “averse to making changes in anything” and were “stubbornly refusing to heed the pressures for change”—sentiments that became even more pronounced as 1989 wore on. Hence, the challenge Soviet officials faced was to push, discreetly but meaningfully, for liberalization in the four holdout countries. At a minimum, Soviet leaders wanted to convey the message through all possible channels that the Soviet Union would oppose the use of violent repression. To this end, Gorbachev’s public comments about Eastern Europe grew bolder. In a speech before the Council of Europe in July 1989, he expressed support for the maintenance of socialism in Europe, but then indicated a willingness to accept whatever result might come:

The social and political orders of certain countries [in Europe] changed in the past, and could change again in the future. However, this is exclusively a matter for the peoples themselves to decide; it is their choice. Any interference in internal affairs, or any attempts to limit the sovereignty of states – including friends and allies, or anyone else – are impermissible.¹¹⁵

The speech, coming at a time when Solidarity seemed poised to form a non-Communist government in Poland and when “round table” talks were moving briskly ahead in Hungary, dispelled any lingering hopes the hardline East European regimes might have had that Gorbachev would try to rein in the forces he had unleashed. The

¹¹⁵ “Rech’ M. S. Gorbacheva,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 7 July 1989), 2.

morale of the East German, Czechoslovak, and Romanian leaders, which had been eroding for at least a year, plummeted further, and a sense of desperation crept in during the latter half of 1989.

The quickening pace of events throughout the Soviet bloc in the late summer of 1989 culminated in two developments that together marked a point of no return in the political complexion of Eastern Europe and also in Soviet policy toward the region: the formation of a Solidarity-led government in Poland in late August, and the Hungarian government's announcement on 10 September that it would open Hungary's border with Austria to let out thousands of East German citizens who had been pouring into Hungary over the previous few months, hoping to make their way from there to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). A year or two earlier, neither of these developments would have seemed plausible, but by August-September 1989 they not only were occurring but were occurring with the Soviet Union's consent.

ASCENDANCE OF MAZOWIECKI'S GOVERNMENT

On 27 May 1989, a week before the elections in Poland, the CPSU Politburo received a memorandum from the deputy head of the CPSU International Department, Rafail Fedorov, reporting that "the election campaign [in Poland] has not unfolded in the PZPR's favor" and that "the authority of the PZPR has continued to fall." Fedorov expressed concern that "results that are very unfavorable for the PZPR will be dangerous [for the Soviet Union] both at this point and in the future." He warned that although "the PZPR leadership has belatedly come to appreciate the danger of the situation," the party's "efforts to halt all the negative trends" might not be enough to turn the situation around.¹¹⁶ Sobering as Fedorov's report may have been, it actually underestimated the humiliation that was about to be inflicted on the PZPR. On 4 June the Polish Communists suffered a resounding defeat, which left the leaders of the party in stunned disbelief.

¹¹⁶ "TsK KPSS: O predvybornoi kampanii v Pol'she," Memorandum No. 17-382 (Top Secret) from R. Fedorov, first deputy head of the CPSU International Department, to the CPSU Politburo, 27 May 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 762, Ll. 123-26.

Despite this unwelcome setback, Gorbachev and his advisers publicly and privately expressed acceptance of the results, giving the Polish Communist authorities no choice but to go along with their party's defeat, if only reluctantly. Plans devised by the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs for the possible imposition of martial law in the event of an undesired outcome had to be shelved.¹¹⁷ Gorbachev's speech at the Council of Europe declaring that the Soviet Union would "respect the absolute right of every nation to choose its own social system as it sees fit" provided a further boost to Solidarity in Poland's post-election maneuvering. To dispel any ambiguity about this phrasing, Gorbachev instructed one of his top aides, Vadim Zagladin, to make clear that Poland, like every other nation, had the "absolute right to choose its own social system," including the option of a non-Communist government. When Zagladin was asked, on the eve of Gorbachev's visit to Strasbourg, whether the Soviet Union would be willing to tolerate a Solidarity-led government in Warsaw, he replied: "We will maintain ties with any Polish government that emerges after the recent elections. This is purely a Polish internal affair. Any solution adopted by our Polish friends will be acceptable to us."¹¹⁸

By indicating that the question of whether Poland would remain a Communist state was "purely a Polish internal affair," Zagladin sent a powerful message to the Polish authorities (and, indirectly, to all the other leaders in Eastern Europe). Certainly no one in the PZPR could any longer hope that the Soviet Union would, in extremis, come to the rescue—militarily or otherwise—of the decaying Communist regime in Warsaw.

The Soviet Union's role in the process remained vital in late July 1989, when pressure mounted in Poland for the establishment of a non-Communist government headed by Solidarity. Jaruzelski tried to stave off this development by publicly warning that "adjoining states,"

¹¹⁷ For details on these plans, see Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)," 195–97.

¹¹⁸ Cited in "Každy rząd będzie dla nas partnerem," *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 4 July 1989), 1. See also the commentary by Adam Michnik, "Pożegnanie doktryny Breżniewa," *ibid.*, 5.

especially the Soviet Union, would “look at this askance.”¹¹⁹ The Polish leader was hoping that the Soviet government would back him up, but his hopes proved in vain. After consulting with Gorbachev, Aleksandr Yakovlev discreetly sought assurances from Solidarity that it would uphold Poland’s obligations in the Warsaw Pact and under bilateral treaties with the USSR. Having obtained these assurances, Yakovlev declared that “political arrangements in Poland are solely for the Poles themselves to decide, without interference from outside.” The Soviet Union, he added, would accept any government that emerged, “no matter who is in charge.”¹²⁰

With that, the PZPR’s last hope of preserving its “leading role” (i.e., hegemonic political position) in Polish society disappeared. By the third week in August the Polish Communist authorities were forced to give Solidarity an opportunity to form its own government under Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Before Mazowiecki’s government could actually take office, however, Soviet intervention was required again. The PZPR First Secretary, Mieczysław Rakowski, made a last-ditch effort to undercut the new government by declaring that he would not go along with Mazowiecki’s appointment unless the PZPR was given additional ministerial slots beyond the two already promised. Lech Wałęsa and Mazowiecki warned Rakowski to “stop rocking the boat” with “threats and blackmail,” and a deadlock ensued.¹²¹ For a brief while the whole arrangement in Poland seemed on the verge of collapse, but Gorbachev stepped in to salvage it. He brought the matter before the CPSU Politburo and gained unanimous support for a direct admonition to Rakowski.¹²² The Soviet leader then placed

¹¹⁹ Cited in “Przed utworzeniem rządu – mówią uczestnicy konsultacji,” *Trybuna Ludu* (Warsaw, 27 July 1989), 2.

¹²⁰ Quoted by TASS, 29 July 1989, Item 1127/203. See also “Predlozheniya o razgovore s pol’skimi deyatelyami,” Memorandum from A. N. Yakovlev to M. S. Gorbachev (Secret), 18 August 1989, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 2, D. 187, L. 1-5.

¹²¹ “Więcej rozumu, mniej serca,” *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 23 August 1989), 1; and “Nowy premier, nowy rząd: Czego się po nich spodziewać,” *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 24 August 1989), 1.

¹²² “Postanovlenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS No. 164/133 21 avgusta 1989 g.,” CPSU Politburo Resolution (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 3, Op. 103, D. 180, L. 63.

a forty-minute telephone call to Rakowski as the process reached its most delicate stage. Although Gorbachev assured him that the PZPR would continue to enjoy staunch Soviet backing, he “recommended” that the Polish Communists avoid a costly and prolonged confrontation with Solidarity—a striking reversal of the situation in 1980-1981 when the Soviet Politburo had vehemently demanded that the leaders of the PZPR crack down harshly on Solidarity as soon as possible.¹²³ Right after the phone call, Rakowski announced that he would seek “partnerlike cooperation” between the PZPR and Solidarity and would no longer insist on receiving extra portfolios. Shortly thereafter, a PZPR press official hailed Solidarity for its “realistic approach,” and the outgoing Communist prime minister, Czesław Kiszczak, lauded Mazowiecki as “an outstanding personality” and “a wise man.”¹²⁴

The prospect of a non-Communist government in Poland provoked alarm among the anti-reformist East European states, which openly expressed consternation at “the destruction of socialist gains in Poland.” The Romanian authorities publicly denounced the pending changes in Poland, arguing that they would benefit “imperialist, reactionary forces” and “jeopardize the interests of socialism, including the Warsaw Pact.”¹²⁵ In an ironic reversal of Romania’s position in 1968, leaders in Bucharest secretly urged the other Warsaw Pact states to join in sending troops to Poland to prevent Solidarity from coming to power:

As a Communist party and socialist country, [we] cannot consider this to be solely a Polish internal affair. [We] believe it concerns all socialist countries. ... The Communist and workers’ parties of the socialist countries, representing the members of the Warsaw Pact, should adopt a stance and demand that Solidarity not be entrusted with the mission of forming a government. [We] have decided to appeal to ... the leaders of the parties in the Warsaw

¹²³ “Konferencja prasowa rzecznika KC: Wtorek wydarzen i rozmów,” *Trybuna Ludu* (Warsaw, 23 August 1989), 1–2.

¹²⁴ Cited in “Rząd – kiddy, jaki, czyj?” *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 23 August 1989), 3; and “Murem za sprawami wsi,” *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 24 August 1989), 1.

¹²⁵ “De la Varşovia,” *Scinteia* (Bucharest, 20 August 1989), 1.

Pact countries and other socialist countries to express serious concern and to ask for joint [military] action to avert the grave situation in Poland and to defend socialism and the Polish people.¹²⁶

Soviet leaders immediately dismissed any such notion and lodged a stern protest with the Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, whose relationship with Gorbachev had long been uneasy and strained.¹²⁷ Ceaușescu had sought to gain the PZPR's backing for joint Warsaw Pact action against Solidarity, but Polish Communist leaders had swiftly rejected the "invitation" and openly criticized it. The CPSU Politburo thereupon told Ceaușescu that "the PZPR is better qualified than anyone to judge whether such action would be worthwhile," and that the Romanians should "heed the PZPR's advice" and drop the matter.¹²⁸ The Soviet Politburo emphasized to Ceaușescu that the USSR would refuse to "take any steps that would vitiate Poland's sovereignty," a position that Ceaușescu himself had championed until August 1989.

¹²⁶ The full text of Romania's appeal, dated 19 August 1989 (the same day that Mazowiecki was officially invited to form a government), is reproduced in "Dokumenty: Polska-Rumunia," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), 29 September-1 October 1989, 6. This bizarre episode was reported at length in the same issue of *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

¹²⁷ "Postanovlenie Politbyuro Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS No. P164/132: Ob obrashchenii t. N. Chaushesku," CPSU Politburo Resolution No. 164/132 (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 180, Ll. 2, 6-7, 63; "Postanovlenie Politbyuro Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS No. P164/169: Ob otvete rumynskomu rukovodstvu na predlozhenie o provedenii vstrechi rukovoditelei bratskikh partii sotsialisticheskikh po voprosu o polozhenii v Pol'she," CPSU Politburo Resolution No. P164/169 (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 180, Ll. 2, 7, 76; and "Otvete rumynskomu rukovodstvu na predlozhenie o provedenii vstrechi dlya obsuzhdeniya o polozhenii v Pol'she," Draft Letter (Top Secret) from CPSU Politburo to Nicolae Ceaușescu, 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 181, Ll. 140-41.

¹²⁸ "Otvete rumynskomu rukovodstvu na predlozhenie," L. 140. In Hungary the authorities expressed even sharper criticism of the Romanian proposal. See "Jegyzőkönyv az Elnökség 1989. augusztus 21-én megtartott üléséről: 7. A Román Kommunista Párt és Nicolae Ceaușescu üzenete a magyar vezetéshez a lengyelországi eseményekkel kapcsolatban," MSZMP Elnökség 1989/141 (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in Hoover Archives, Imre Pozsgay Papers, Box 45, Folder MSZMP Elnöksége, 1989, Group 5.

In subsequent days, the Soviet press went out of its way to commend Mazowiecki for being a “calm, equable politician” who during “his many years of experience” had “never sought to promote himself.”¹²⁹ Coverage of Solidarity also turned distinctly favorable. High-ranking Soviet officials stressed that “the Poles have chosen their own path of development” and “are able to decide their fate for themselves.”¹³⁰ Mazowiecki’s government was able to take office without further ado, and the Soviet Union transmitted a message of congratulations pledging continued “friendship and cooperation” with Poland.¹³¹

Gorbachev reaffirmed his willingness to accept and even welcome the new Polish government when he sent the head of the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB), Vladimir Kryuchkov, who was also a CPSU Politburo member, to Warsaw shortly after Mazowiecki took office. Kryuchkov conveyed Gorbachev’s “wishes of great success” and praised Mazowiecki as “a solid man” who “knows what his country needs.”¹³² In a separate meeting with senior PZPR officials, Kryuchkov warned that the Polish Communists must help, rather than hinder, the new prime minister. Rakowski heeded this message by promptly ordering all PZPR members in the state administration to work loyally for Mazowiecki and his ministers.¹³³

¹²⁹ L. Toporkov, “Trudnyi vybor: V Pol’she skladyvaetsya novaya rasstanovka politicheskikh sil,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 23 August 1989, 4; and A. Starukhin, “Reshenie seima PNR,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 25 August 1989), 7.

¹³⁰ Comments of Evgenii Primakov, chairman of the Council of the Union of the USSR Supreme Soviet, transcribed in “Press-konferentsiya v Londone Predsedatelya Soveta soyuza Verkhovnogo soveta SSSR E. M. Primakova,” TASS, 5 September 1989, item 3 (Two weeks later, Primakov was elevated to candidate membership on the CPSU Politburo.) See also the interview with Nikolai Shishlin, in *Libération* (Paris), 22 September 1989, 4.

¹³¹ “Predsedatelyu Soveta Ministrov Pol’skoi Narodnoi Respubliki Tadeushu Mazovetskomu,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 25 August 1989), 4.

¹³² “Vstrechi v Varshave,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 27 August 1989), 3.

¹³³ Information about Kryuchkov’s visit was supplied by Georgii Shakhnazarov when I interviewed him in Moscow in March and May 1998. Kryuchkov himself offered essentially the same account when I interviewed him in Moscow in July 1999. See also Antoni Dudek, “Kalendarium, 1986–1989: Polska droga do demokracji,” in Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, *Polska 1986–1989*:

Even though Gorbachev undoubtedly would have preferred to see the Polish government come under the control of reform-minded Communists rather than Solidarity, he and his advisers on Eastern Europe increasingly sensed that no Communist leader in Poland could win sufficient popular support to guarantee political stability. Only a government led by Solidarity could take the steps needed to forestall political turmoil and dangerous crises in Poland and the unpalatable dilemmas that would follow. Faced with a choice of promoting the formation of a stable, non-Communist government in Poland or upholding orthodox Communist rule by any means necessary, Gorbachev—unlike his predecessors—opted for the former.

OPENING OF THE HUNGARIAN BORDER

Barely two weeks after Mazowiecki took charge of the Polish government, an equally momentous development rocked the GDR. On 10 September the Hungarian government announced that it would allow free passage from Hungary into Austria for many thousands of East German citizens ensconced on Hungarian territory. Because Austria was contiguous with both Hungary and West Germany, the East German squatters viewed it as their most viable route of entry into the FRG, where they knew they would be granted citizenship automatically. Thus began the largest exodus of East Germans to the West since August 1961, when the building of the Berlin Wall had essentially halted the flight of GDR citizens to the FRG.

The Hungarian announcement did not come out of the blue. Pressure for it had been building since early May 1989, when the Hungarian government sought to burnish its liberal, pro-Western credentials by “dismantling the Iron Curtain” along the border with Austria, the only Western country adjoining Hungary.¹³⁴ The deci-

Koniec systemu—Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji, 3 vols. (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2002), vol. 1 (Paweł Machcewics, ed., *Referaty*), 205.

¹³⁴ For brief but perceptive accounts of this episode in the larger context of Hungary's relations with the two German states, see Friedrich Kurz, “Ungarn 89,” in Dieter Grosser, Stephan Bierling, and Friedrich Kurz, *Die sieben Mythen der Wiedervereinigung: Fakten und Analysen zu einem Prozeß ohne Alternativen* (Munich: Ehrenwirth 1991), 123–63; and István Horváth

sion to take this symbolically important step had been adopted by Hungarian leaders at the end of February 1989 with the consent of Gorbachev, who met in Moscow a few days later with Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh and said approvingly that both Hungary and the Soviet Union were “becoming more open.”¹³⁵ The Hungarian authorities’ gesture of removing electronic barriers and barbed wire at border points with Austria (and also with Yugoslavia) did aptly convey a new spirit of openness, but it also had the unintended effect of spurring tens of thousands of East Germans to travel to Hungary, a country they were allowed to visit with minimal restrictions. Once in Hungary, the East Germans moved en masse to the western border area, hoping to be granted permission to cross into Austria.

After Hungarian officials did little to prevent a few hundred East Germans from entering Austria, leaders in the GDR angrily demanded that Hungary abide by a 20-year-old bilateral treaty, which required that individuals attempting to cross a border illegally (i.e., without proper authorization from their own country) be returned to their country of origin. To forestall a bitter confrontation with the GDR, the Hungarian government temporarily blocked any border crossings until a satisfactory arrangement could be worked out between East Germany and West Germany. In the meantime, the Hungarian government declined to return any of the East Germans to the GDR and instead set up makeshift refugee camps for them, much to the irritation of authorities in East Berlin, who insisted that “citizens of the GDR who are illegally present on Hungarian territory are not ‘refugees’ and must be returned immediately.” As several more weeks dragged by and the dispute remained at an impasse, conditions in the camps deteriorated with the onset of summer rains and mud. Hungarian commentators and members of parliament increasingly urged the government to

and István Németh, *És a falak leomlanak: Magyarország és a német egység (1945–1990)* (Budapest: Magvető, 1999), 329–33. For additional context, see István Horváth, *Az elszalasztott lehetőség: A magyar–német kapcsolatok 1980–1991* (Budapest: Corvina, 2009), 131–34.

¹³⁵ “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenom TsK VSRP, Predsedatelem Soveta Ministrov VNR Mikloshem Nemetom, 3 marta 1989,” Notes of Conversation (Top Secret), 3 March 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 10325.

settle the matter "in accordance with Hungary's humanitarian commitments and goals."¹³⁶

By late August the situation in the camps was becoming untenable to maintain for much longer. On 25 August, Hungarian leaders met in the FRG with their West German counterparts to resolve the matter irrespective of what the GDR wanted. In discussions with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher at Gymnich Castle outside Erfstadt, Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh and Foreign Minister Gyula Horn agreed to allow the East Germans in the camps to leave for Austria en route to the FRG. In tacit exchange for this step, the West German leaders promised to give Hungary financial support for its democratization and market reforms and to encourage other major Western countries to do the same.¹³⁷ This bargain was struck before the Hungarians had consulted with Soviet leaders (though some Soviet diplomats in Bonn and Budapest had gotten wind of the arrangement by this point). Subsequently, Foreign Minister Horn spoke to Shevardnadze, who agreed with the Hungarian position that the East German refugees "must not be returned by force" and should be allowed to go. Chancellor Kohl, for his part, contacted Gorbachev to gauge his reaction to the plan. The Soviet leader replied laconically that "the Hungarians are good people," a phrase he intended as a green light.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Horváth and Németh, *És a falak leomlanak*, 331.

¹³⁷ Gyula Horn, *Freiheit, die ich meine: Erinnerungen des ungarischen Außenministers, der den eisernen Vorhang öffnete* (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe Verlag, 1991), 317–20; and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), 639–40. Declassified German transcripts of the negotiations held on 25 August, "Vermerk des Bundesministers Genscher über das Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Ministerpräsident Nemeth und Außenminister Horn auf Schloß Gymnich" and "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl und des Bundesministers Genscher mit Ministerpräsident Nemeth und Außenminister Horn während des Mittagessens auf Schloß Gymnich," are reproduced in Hanns Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1998), 377–83.

¹³⁸ Helmut Kohl, *"Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit"* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1996), 71–75.

Over the next two weeks, Hungarian leaders made a last-ditch attempt to resolve the matter with the GDR's consent, but these efforts, too, proved futile. East German officials continued to insist that the refugees first had to return to the GDR, where "with legal assistance they could pursue their individual exit visas." In response, Horn emphasized that the East Germans on Hungarian territory had "no desire to return to the GDR." He told his East German counterparts that their proposal to coerce people into going back "was simply out of the question." Horn expressed great skepticism when East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer claimed that his government did "not intend to restrict travel to Hungary from the GDR."¹³⁹

The leaders of the East German Socialist Unity Party (SED) tried to convene an emergency session of the Warsaw Pact's Committee of Foreign Ministers that would compel the Hungarians to return East German refugees to the GDR. Soviet, Hungarian, and Polish officials demurred, arguing that such a gathering would be an inappropriate venue for dealing with the situation. When the SED Politburo met on 5 September, the assembled officials had no doubt that "Hungary will be yielding to pressure from the FRG" and "will not play its cards openly."¹⁴⁰ The SED Secretary for ideological affairs, Kurt Hager, complained that Hungary was "behaving hypocritically" and "doing the bidding of Bonn" at the expense of "hitherto normal relations with [the GDR]." Others at the meeting expressed confidence that by "strengthening allied ties [in the Warsaw Pact], especially with the Soviet Union," East Germany could weather the worst of the storm.¹⁴¹ Soviet diplomats in the region had indeed shown distinct sympathy for the East German regime's plight and had tried to persuade the

¹³⁹ These exchanges are recounted on the basis of a conversation between West German and Hungarian Foreign Ministry officials, the latter of whom described Horn's meeting with Fischer, transcribed in "Fernschreiben des Staatssekretars Bertele an den Chef des Bundeskanzleramtes Ausreisewillige DDR-Burger; Lage in Ungarn und in der Standigen Vertretung," 1 September 1989, in Küsters and Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, 391.

¹⁴⁰ "Verlauf der SED-Politburositzung am 5. September 1989," Stenographic Summary of SED Politburo meeting (Top Secret), 5 September 1989, in SAPMO, Zentrales Parteiarhiv (ZPA), J IV 212/039/77.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Blatt (Bl.) 3.

Hungarians to avert any exodus.¹⁴² But the SED Politburo's hopes that the highest Soviet leaders, including Gorbachev, would begin pressuring Hungary to reverse its policy were quickly dashed. Gorbachev by this point had no intention of cracking down.

Most revealing of all at the SED Politburo meeting was Erich Mielke's comment that "Hungary is betraying socialism" (*Ungarn verrät den Sozialismus*)—a sentiment that reflected East German leaders' dismay at the whole course of events in the Soviet bloc over the past year-and-a-half.¹⁴³ Mielke, Erich Honecker, and other senior East German officials had long feared that far-reaching internal liberalization in Hungary, including sweeping reassessments of the 1956 revolution, would erode Hungary's loyalty to Warsaw Pact allies, especially the GDR. The East German hardliners were alarmed by what they saw as Hungary's steady "movement out of the community of socialist states," reflected in public discussion in Budapest of the possibility of "abandoning Marxism-Leninism, doing away with democratic centralism, and abolishing the centrally planned economy in favor of private ownership."¹⁴⁴ Even though Gorbachev by late 1988 had jettisoned the Brezhnev Doctrine, the members of the SED Politburo clearly had not. They were averse to deviations from orthodox Communism anywhere in the Soviet bloc, and they were especially worried now that the USSR, far from trying to block and undo the democratic changes under way in Hungary and Poland, was itself embracing similar policies and encouraging liberalization in other countries.

The East German authorities' fears of being isolated in the Warsaw Pact came to a head on 10 September when Horn publicly announced that Hungary would allow some 20,000 East German refugees to cross freely into Austria, from which they could make their

¹⁴² "Vermerk über das Gespräch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Oskar Fischer, mit dem Außerordentlichen und Bevollmächtigten Botschafter der UdSSR in der DDR, Wjatscheslaw Kotschemassow, am 7.9.1989," Notes from Conversation (Secret), 7 September 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 212/AI3/239.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, Bl. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Comments by SED officials cited in "Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1989 szeptember 19-i üléséről," Verbatim Transcript of MSZMP Political Executive Committee session (Secret), 19 September 1989, in Magyar Országos Levéltár, M-KS 288, F. 5/1068. ő.e.

way to the FRG. Hungary, he declared, did not want to “become a country of refugee camps” and was determined to “resolve the situation on humanitarian grounds.”¹⁴⁵ Hungarian Foreign Minister Ferenc Somogyi told journalists that in taking the decision, the Hungarian government was seeking “to open up and diversify relations with Western Europe and the West in general” and to “keep [Hungary] from losing prestige and respect in the international community.” He stressed that Hungary was now giving “absolute primacy to universal humanitarian values” and was thereby moving much “closer to the West in humanitarian concerns” and away from the GDR.¹⁴⁶

Honecker and his colleagues had been expecting the announcement but still reacted with fury. They had received a scathing report on 11 September from the East German ambassador to Hungary, Gerd Vehres, who insisted that “discussions with the GDR” regarding the refugees had led to nothing more than “stonewalling and deliberately misleading the GDR.” Hungarian officials, Vehres claimed, had “made no serious attempts” to persuade the East German citizens to return to the GDR and had obstructed efforts by East German embassy officials to “contact GDR citizens in the camps to explain the GDR’s point of view.” The ambassador blamed the Hungarian media for “stirring up and promoting a campaign directed against the GDR” that had “encouraged GDR citizens to stay” in Hungary.¹⁴⁷ Similar complaints were voiced by high-ranking Communist officials in Bucharest and Prague, who feared that the destabilization of the GDR would endanger their own hardline regimes.

¹⁴⁵ Horn, *Freiheit, die ich meine*, 327–28.

¹⁴⁶ Henry Kamm, “Hungary’s Motive: Earning Western Good Will,” *The New York Times*, 15 September 1989, A10. On this point, see also “Jegyzőkönyv az Elnökség 1989. szeptember 11-én megtartott üléséről: 4. Nyers Rezső elvtárs szóbeli bejelentése alapján,” MSZMP Elnökség 1989 (Top Secret), 11 September 1989, in Hoover Archives, Imre Pozsgay Papers, Box 45, Folder MSZMP Elnöksége, 1989, Group 8, pp. 4–6.

¹⁴⁷ “Schreiben von DDR Botschafter in Ungarn, Gerd Vehres, an den Außenminister Oskar Fischer vom 10. September 1989,” Cable (Top Secret) from Vehres to Foreign Minister Fischer, 10 September 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 212/A13/239, Bl. 1–2. Annotations indicate that copies were distributed to all SED Politburo members on 11 September 1989.

In Moscow, however, the Hungarian decision generated only a low-key response and no protest at all from the Soviet government. The Soviet Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Gennadii Gerasimov, merely said that the step was "unusual" and then added—in a statement that must have stunned East German leaders—that "it does not affect us [in the USSR] directly."¹⁴⁸ Official Soviet television coverage of Hungary's decision was surprisingly sympathetic, pointing out, for example, that "the situation on the Austro-Hungarian border had become tense, and there were a growing number of illegal border crossings and various crimes. It was in this context that the Hungarian government was forced to take its decision." The Soviet news broadcast also pointed out that Hungarian leaders had spent a great deal of time "consulting with the appropriate agencies" and had acted only after "talks between the GDR and the FRG on this matter had produced no results."¹⁴⁹

The Soviet Union's willingness to go along with the Hungarian decision, and Gerasimov's comment separating the USSR from the GDR, were bound to deal a further blow to the morale of the East German regime. Even though Honecker still hoped that, when push came to shove, the Soviet Union would never allow the SED to be ousted from power, he had finally started to worry that a scenario he once thought would never happen—namely, that his regime would be abandoned by the Soviet Union—was coming true. Honecker conveyed his deep unease to a sympathetic CPSU Politburo member, Egor Ligachev, who happened to be visiting the GDR at the time.¹⁵⁰ Ligachev himself had become increasingly disaffected with the changes under way in the Soviet Union as well as in Hungary and Poland, and he did his best to stiffen Honecker's resolve and reassure him that the USSR fully supported its East German ally. Ligachev prom-

¹⁴⁸ "V Press-tsentre MID SSSR," 12 September 1989, TASS newswire, item 2–12.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Jan Obrman, "East European Reaction to Hungary's Decision on East Germany Refugees," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report No. 174 (Eastern Europe), 15 September 1989, 2.

¹⁵⁰ On Ligachev's discussions with SED leaders, see "Niederschrift über das Gespräch von Günter Mittag mit KPdSU-Sekretär Jegor Ligatschow am 14. September 1989," Notes from Conversation (Top Secret), September 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2/2A/3241.

ised that Gorbachev would be attending the celebrations in October 1989 marking the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR, as a demonstration of Moscow's support. (At a meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow on 28 July 1989, Honecker had invited—indeed urged—him to attend the 40th-anniversary celebrations, and the Soviet leader had initially agreed to take part.¹⁵¹ But by early September Gorbachev had tentatively changed his mind about going to East Berlin, lest he be seen as trying to strengthen Honecker's position against more reform-minded Communists in East Germany. Thus, Ligachev's comments to Honecker at the time were not strictly accurate. Only after considerable hesitation and further discussions with advisers did Gorbachev finally decide to travel to the GDR.¹⁵²)

Honecker welcomed the news that Gorbachev would be coming, evidently hoping that it would stabilize the situation in the GDR. But in the meantime the departure of East German citizens to the FRG—mostly from Austria via Hungary but also some via Czechoslovakia and other transit countries—continued at a brisk pace, reaching a total of more than 230,000 within several weeks.¹⁵³ The East German government tried to stem the outflow by imposing severe restrictions on travel to Hungary, including a strict visa requirement, but many people were still able to cross into Hungary. The exodus helped to fuel political unrest and mass demonstrations in the GDR itself, and by early October 1989 the very survival of the East German regime, not to mention Honecker's hold on power, was increasingly in doubt.

¹⁵¹ "Postanovlenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 30 iyulya 1989 god.: VII. Ob itogakh besedy t. Gorbacheva M. S. s General'nym sekretarem TsK SEPG, Predsedatelem Gosudarstvennogo soveta GDR t. E. Khonekkerom," CPSU Politburo Resolution No. 152/VII (Top Secret), 30 July 1989, in RGANI, F. 3, Op. 103, D. 177, Ll. 6–7.

¹⁵² Valentin Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen* (Munich: Droemer Knauer, 1993), 484.

¹⁵³ The figure of 230,000 comes from "Telefongespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Generalsekretär Gorbatschow 11. November 1989," Transcript of Telephone Conversation (Secret), 11 November 1989, with notation "zdA T[eltschik] 16/11," in Küsters and Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, 165–69. See also Kurz, "Ungarn 89," 159–60.

Change and Upheaval in Eastern Europe

If Gorbachev had been determined to prevent Hungary from allowing the East German refugees to depart for the FRG, he certainly could have done so. Even though Hungarian leaders were acting with greater independence by the summer of 1989, they would not have defied the Soviet Union if Soviet political and military officials had applied strong pressure and engaged in threats. Far from exerting pressure, however, Gorbachev did the opposite when he indicated to Hungarian and West German leaders that the Soviet government would not object if Hungary permitted the East Germans to enter Austria. Soviet policy on this matter in 1989 amounted to a fundamental rejection of the principles and assumptions that had guided Soviet policy until the late 1980s. No Soviet leader prior to Gorbachev would have even contemplated allowing an event to happen that would cast doubt on the legitimacy and *raison d'être* of the GDR.

Gorbachev's determination to avoid violent repression against peaceful protests in Eastern Europe, no matter how turbulent the situation became, was a remarkably bold posture to adopt in circumstances that would have induced all previous Soviet leaders to crack down. The pressure of events can often force undesirable actions, but Gorbachev sedulously resisted it. Moreover, by siding with the Hungarian and Polish governments as they undertook far-reaching liberalization and democratization, Gorbachev signaled his endorsement of their domestic policies. By the same token, even though he claimed that the Soviet Union would not be imposing reforms on other socialist countries, he left no doubt in his public and private comments that he believed all the East European governments must sooner or later enact major changes at home—changes that no previous Soviet leader would have tolerated, much less encouraged. The growing radicalization of Gorbachev's own political agenda, combined with his approbation of the sweeping political programs in Hungary and Poland, was bound to provoke a good deal of restiveness in the four East European countries that had tried to eschew any loosening of political control.

This surge of ferment was reinforced by the increasing perception in Eastern Europe that the Soviet Union would not defend hard-line regimes against internal challenges—a perception that not only

emboldened protesters but also demoralized the Communist leaders who were targets of the protests. The full magnitude of the forces unleashed by Gorbachev's policies and by the "winds of change" that spread from the Soviet Union (and Hungary and Poland) to other Warsaw Pact countries became apparent in the last few months of 1989, when millions of people in Eastern Europe—most of whom until 1989 would never have dared to join mass protests against Communist rule—seized the opportunity to push, both collectively and individually, for sweeping political change and democratization. Events that would have been unthinkable even a year or two earlier suddenly happened in rapid succession: a peaceful revolution from below in East Germany, the opening and gradual dismantling of the Berlin Wall, popular unrest and the downfall of Todor Zhivkov in Bulgaria, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and violent upheaval and the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu in Romania. Change from below in East Germany and Czechoslovakia had been made possible by change at the top in the Soviet Union and had accelerated once the morale of hardline elites in Eastern Europe began collapsing as they increasingly realized that the Soviet Union would not be intervening on their behalf. None of these factors on its own, however, would have been enough to transform the political complexion of the region. Only through the interaction of these sources of change, along with some degree of luck, could the Soviet bloc have fallen apart.

The crucial test case in all this, at least for Soviet policy, was the GDR, which for historical, geographic, and strategic reasons was the keystone of the Warsaw Pact. Demonstrations that had begun there in September 1989 escalated in early October, spreading to many cities.¹⁵⁴ Although the protesters still worried that the East German regime might resort to deadly force, fears of a Tiananmen-style onslaught steadily waned in light of the stance taken by Soviet

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 108–67; Andreas Apelt, *Die Opposition in der DDR und die deutsche Frage 1989/90* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009), 145–72; and relevant essays in Eckart Conze, Katharina Gajdukowa, and Sigrid Koch-Baumgarteneds, eds., *Die demokratische Revolution in der DDR 1989* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2009).

leaders, notably during Gorbachev's visit to the GDR in early October 1989, which Honecker mistakenly had assumed would help shore up his position in the SED. Gorbachev's presence at the 40th anniversary celebration did give a dose of support to the GDR, but the impact of his visit on Honecker personally was much less auspicious. Gorbachev had told his aides beforehand that he had "no desire to go" to the GDR, and he vowed "not to say a single word in support of Honecker."¹⁵⁵ Gorbachev's initial meeting with Honecker on 7 October took place after the two leaders had walked by crowds of East Germans who conspicuously ignored Honecker and joyfully chanted "Gorby! Gorby!" and held up signs in Russian exclaiming "Gorbachev, you are our only hope!"

During the initial discussions with Honecker, Gorbachev implied that the East German leader was "deeply confused" about the political changes under way in the Soviet Union. Honecker, for his part, stuck to old dogmas, claiming that the only people "pressuring the GDR to adopt reforms" were the state's "opponents," especially the "chauvinists" in West Germany, who "are seeking to dictate rules of behavior to us."¹⁵⁶ Honecker insisted that "the working class and especially the peasants [in the GDR] are in a good mood now. The workers support the party's line." Years later, Gorbachev recalled that Honecker's dulcet characterization of the social mood in the GDR was particularly "bewildering." The East German leader's comments, Gorbachev said, "had nothing to do with reality" and were "100 percent rubbish."¹⁵⁷

At a follow-on meeting later in the day with Honecker and other SED Politburo members, Gorbachev was blunter than usual in indicating that it was time for Honecker to go. The Soviet leader began by warning that "when the party lags behind in a theoretical and practical

¹⁵⁵ Diary Entry for 5 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 805–6.

¹⁵⁶ "Zapis' besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s E. Khonekkerom," Notes from Conversation (Secret), 7 October 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 10205. For the German transcript, see "Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker mit Generalsekretär des ZK der UdSSR, Michail Gorbatschow, am 7.10.1989, mit handschriftlichen Korrekturen von Honecker," Marked-up Transcript (Top Secret), 7 October 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2/2035/60.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Gorbachev, in Moscow, 15 March 2007.

sense, there will be bitter fruit to harvest.”¹⁵⁸ He then stressed that the SED had been lagging behind under Honecker and that an overhaul was needed:

Adopting a decision to carry out political changes is definitely not an easy matter. The time awaits you when you will have to make courageous decisions. ... People are demanding a new social atmosphere and more oxygen in the society, especially because this pertains to a socialist order. ... I am referring here to the need to create not only a material but also a social-spiritual atmosphere for the development of society. It seems to me this is a lesson for us. It is important that you not miss your chance. Life punishes us when we are late. ... On the basis of our own experience and the experience of Poland and Hungary in particular, we can say with great confidence to you that if your party pretends that nothing special is going on and does not react to the demands of life, it will be doomed. ... You and we have only one choice—to move decisively forward or to be defeated. ... We often see that someone among the leaders cannot pull his weight any longer, but we do not decide to replace him, as though we are afraid of offending him. In the meantime, problems fester and become extremely acute. On the whole, there are many “warning bells” for your party.¹⁵⁹

Separately, Gorbachev spoke with Egon Krenz, a leading figure in the SED who was 25 years younger than Honecker and was widely seen

¹⁵⁸ “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenami Politbyuro TsK SEPG,” Notes from Gorbachev’s meeting with SED leaders (Top Secret), 7 October 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 10174, Ll. 1-9. For the German version, see “Treffen der Genossen des Politburos des Zentralkomitees der SED mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KPdSU und Vorsitzenden des Obersten Sowjets der UdSSR, Genossen Michail Sergejewitsch Gorbatschow, am Sonabend, den 7. Oktober 1989 in Berlin-Niederschönhausen: Stenografische Niederschrift,” Transcript of Meeting (Top Secret), 7 October 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2/2035/60.

¹⁵⁹ “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenami Politbyuro TsK SEPG,” Ll. 1-3, 4-6, 9.

as the likely successor, about the need to replace Honecker as soon as possible.¹⁶⁰

On 11 October, a few days after Gorbachev had returned to Moscow, he received word from the Soviet ambassador in the GDR that Krenz would be pushing for a leadership change at the next session of the SED Politburo.¹⁶¹ The news came as an obvious relief to Gorbachev, who, upon returning from the GDR, had told his aides that Honecker was a “jackass” (*mudak*) who wanted to stay in power indefinitely and who kept on muttering the same empty shibboleths. Gorbachev felt that Honecker would have done a service to everyone, including himself, if he had resigned voluntarily rather than waiting until he was forced out:

He could say to his people that he has had four surgical operations and is now 78, and a lot of strength is required for such a turbulent period, and could you please release me from my duties now that I have done my part. That way, he could keep his place in history.¹⁶²

Gorbachev's aides were more doubtful that Honecker would be remembered favorably even if he resigned right away. In their view, he was so “reviled by his own people” that nothing he could do would improve his image.¹⁶³

Even as Honecker was about to be removed, he and Mielke were still desperately hoping that Gorbachev would ultimately give them the go-ahead for a full-scale crackdown in the GDR. The East German ambassador in Moscow left no doubt about this later on in a private conversation with Aleksandr Yakovlev describing the “extraordinary nervousness” at the highest levels of the SED.¹⁶⁴ Rather than providing

¹⁶⁰ Diary Entry for 8 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 806. See also Egon Krenz, *Herbst '89* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1999), 77–78, 80–83.

¹⁶¹ Diary Entry for 11 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 808–9.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 808. Actually, Honecker at the time was 77, not 78.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ “TsK KPSS: Zapis' besedy s poslom GDR v SSSR G. Kenigom 20 oktyabrya 1989 g.,” Memorandum of Conversation from A. N. Yakovlev to the CPSU Politburo (Secret), 21 October 1989, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 2, D. 185, Ll. 1–13.

a green light, however, Soviet officials went out of their way to stress that they wanted change in the GDR to move ahead without repression. This message was conveyed to the leaders of the SED through all available channels, and the 380,000 Soviet troops in the GDR received orders to stay in their barracks.¹⁶⁵

Having failed to secure Moscow's approval for the violent quelling of protests, the leaders of the SED concluded that they could not deploy the East German State Security (Stasi) forces and National People's Army to crush internal unrest over Moscow's strong opposition. An operation of this sort, on the scale of China's brutal crack-down in June 1989, would have required at least Soviet acquiescence and more likely direct support, given the huge presence of Soviet troops on GDR territory and the KGB's extensive influence over the Stasi. Even though East German leaders were planning to subdue the demonstrations with their own security forces and troops rather than asking for Soviet military assistance, they knew that such action would be impractical if the Soviet Union vehemently objected to it.¹⁶⁶ Hence, Honecker and Mielke ultimately took no action against the protests, paving the way for Krenz's move against Honecker, who was ousted on 17 October, barely a week after Gorbachev visited and issued his injunction.

If Krenz had displaced Honecker a few months earlier, he might have been able to gain control of the situation and nip the wave of popular unrest in the bud. Krenz was by no means a dynamic or innovative leader, but if he had come to power in June or July he might have been able to forge viable compromises with church leaders and others who ended up playing key roles in the protest movement. The delay of a mere few months in such a fluid situation proved crucial. By the time Honecker was actually removed on 17 October, the situation was too far gone. Rather than diminishing, the protests waxed ever larger and spread to almost every part of the GDR. With remarkable celerity, the SED's erstwhile dominant position in East German society ebbed and disappeared. East German officials had spurned

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, *Meine letzte Mission: Fakten, Erinnerungen, Überlegungen* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994), 168–69.

¹⁶⁶ Reinhold Andert and Wolfgang Herzberg, *Der Sturz: Honecker im Kreuzverhör* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1991), 182–83.

reforms earlier, and essentially what they found in October and early November 1989 was that drastic changes were forced on them, bearing out Gorbachev's warning that "life punishes us when we are late."

The Opening of the Berlin Wall

As events unfolded in the last few months of 1989, the role of chance and contingency became crucial. Nothing illustrated this better than the opening of the Berlin Wall, which occurred on 9 November largely by chance.¹⁶⁷ By the time the Wall opened, the GDR had been in political turmoil for nearly two months, Honecker's regime was long gone, and throngs of East Germans were continuing to try to flee to the West via Hungary or Czechoslovakia. The sudden opening of the Wall thus did not seem as startling as it would have a few months earlier, but the precise timing was unexpected, driven by a series of fortuitous events.

On 9 November, after considerable work had been done by officials from relevant government agencies to codify new travel regulations for East German citizens, the SED Central Committee approved draft guidelines permitting East Germans to pass through checkpoints along the border between the GDR and West Germany and between East Berlin and West Berlin, starting the following week.¹⁶⁸ The East

¹⁶⁷ This event has been recounted and reassessed in many works about the events of October–November 1989 in the GDR. See, for example, Hans-Hermann Hertle and Kathrin Elsner, *Mein. 9. November: Der Tag, an dem die Mauer fiel* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1999); Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer: Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstaflösung des SED-Staates*, 2nd ed. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999); Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Chronik des Mauerfalls: Die dramatischen Ereignisse um den 9. November 1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996); Michael Funken, *Das Jahr der Deutschen: Die glückliche Geschichte von Mauerfall und deutscher Einheit* (Munich: Pendo, 2008); and Heribert von Schwan and Rolf Steininger, eds., *Mein 9. November 1989* (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2009).

¹⁶⁸ "10. Tagung des ZK der SED im Plenarsaal des ZK-Gebäudes in Berlin, 8. November 1989," Record of SED Central Committee plenum (Secret), 8 November 1989, full transcript in SAPMO, ZPA, Ton YI/TD738, reproduced in Hans-Hermann Hertle and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, eds., *Das Ende der SED: die letzten Tage des Zentralkomitees* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1997), 135–439.

German government later in the day expanded the measure to cover private travel for people with appropriate documents.¹⁶⁹ The main impact of the document was on people seeking to leave the GDR permanently, but the distinction between this category and temporary travelers got lost when a senior SED Politburo member, Günter Schabowski, who had just returned to East Berlin and had not yet seen the directive or taken part in any discussions about it, was given the task of announcing it on East German television.

In response to questions from journalists, Schabowski mistakenly claimed that the measure was effective immediately, and when asked by reporters whether it applied to checkpoints along the Berlin Wall, he responded affirmatively. In response to other questions, he erroneously stated that the regulations applied to everyone, and he characterized the guidelines in an open-ended way, implying that all trips were covered and that access through border points was essentially unrestricted. Both of these assertions were erroneous, but Schabowski apparently was unaware of the significance of what he was saying.

Schabowski's announcement spurred subsequent broadcasts on West German and East German television and radio claiming that the Wall had already opened. The reports were incorrect, and initially almost no one was even present at the border checkpoints, which were still closed with no one passing through. But as the broadcasts continued, many Germans on both sides of the border assumed that they were true and that free passage was now allowed.¹⁷⁰ Large numbers of people began streaming toward the Berlin Wall from both sides, gradually forming an immense crowd. East German border guards, who were still technically under orders to prevent any crossings, had no idea what they should do and tried to ease the crush by letting out a small number of people. Far from helping matters, those crossings caused greater confusion and restiveness. The border guards tried repeatedly to call the authorities to obtain up-to-date instructions, but most of

¹⁶⁹ Ministerrat der DDR, "Beschluß: Zur Veränderung der Situation der ständigen Ausreise von DDR-Bürgern nach der BRD über die ČSSR," 9 November 1989, in Bundesarchiv Postdam, DC 20, 1/3–286.7.

¹⁷⁰ For an interesting compendium of younger people's reactions in impromptu letters and notes, see Peter Jung, ed., *AufBRUCH*, 9. November '89: *Leserbriefe aus der DDR* (Cologne: PapyRossa, 2009).

the highest officials were taking part in an SED Central Committee meeting and could not be reached. No one else at upper levels was willing to give orders to enforce the existing rules. Hence, the erroneous broadcasts triggered actions that ultimately converted the error into reality.

Without any clear instructions to follow, the border guards started to let more people through, at first in a trickle and then in an overwhelming wave. When the SED meeting ended, party leaders were startled to learn what was going on, but they realized it was too late to defuse the situation or to return to the status quo ante.¹⁷¹ Germans gathered along the wall, crossed over it, danced on it, hacked away at it, hugged, drank euphoric toasts, and savored a moment that many until very recently had felt they might never experience. The sheer exuberance of that magical night was unforgettable for those who witnessed it.

The response in Moscow to the opening of the Wall was low-key overall.¹⁷² Even as leaders in Warsaw, London, Paris, and one or two other capitals privately expressed great unease and even alarm about what they saw as “the excessively rapid pace of events in the GDR” (to use the words of Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity in Poland), officials in Moscow avoided any shrill reactions to the unexpected turn of events.¹⁷³ Although the Soviet ambassador to the FRG, Yulii Kvitsinskii, was unnerved by the events and hoped that a four-power meeting would be convened, senior officials in Moscow were far more restrained. Because of the 2-hour time difference in Moscow, Gorbachev was already in bed when the crowds were gathering along the Wall. The

¹⁷¹ Krenz, *Herbst* ‘89, 236–50.

¹⁷² In *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 105–7, Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice mistakenly claim that the opening of the Wall sparked “euphoria” in London and Paris but “barely disguised panic” in Moscow. Their characterizations of the reactions in all three of these capitals are inaccurate. Declassified documents make clear that in both London and Paris leaders were deeply uneasy about the situation, whereas in Moscow the reaction was far short of panic.

¹⁷³ “Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit dem Vorsitzenden der Gewerkschaft ‘Solidarität,’ L. Wałęsa,” Transcript of Conversation, 9 November 1989, in Küsters and Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, 492–96.

next day he learned what had happened from the Soviet ambassador to East Germany, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, who was surprised by the equanimity of Gorbachev's reaction.¹⁷⁴ In a telephone conversation on 11 November with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Gorbachev was upbeat about Soviet-FRG relations and said that "events in the GDR" marked a "historic turning point toward new relations and indeed a new world."¹⁷⁵ Although Gorbachev worried that some people in the GDR or FRG might be tempted to "force the situation" and create "chaos," he was confident that he and Kohl could ensure that "profound changes" would unfold in a "stable" and "balanced" way. Gorbachev's comments reflected a certain degree of unease, but overall he seemed relieved that the situation had not spun out of control and that everything had remained peaceful. An even greater sense of relief was expressed by his adviser Anatolii Chernyaev, who wrote in his diary on 10 November that by having facilitated the opening of the Wall, Gorbachev "has proven to be a great figure" who "has sensed the pace of history and has helped it reach its 'natural turn.'"¹⁷⁶

The Wall did not fully open until several weeks later, but the breach of it on 9 November signaled the rapid end of Communism in the GDR and the growing movement toward German reunification. It also marked the death knell of East European Communism and the end of the Cold War. Less than 24 hours after the Wall opened, the long-time Communist dictator in Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, who had been in power for 35 years, was forced to step down. A week later, the Velvet Revolution began in Czechoslovakia, escalating within a few days to demonstrations in Prague involving more than a million people. By the end of the month, Communist rule in Czechoslovakia was fatally weakened and soon disappeared altogether. So drastically did the situation change in Czechoslovakia that the renowned dissident writer Václav Havel, who as recently as January 1989 had been imprisoned after criticizing the harshness of the Czechoslovak regime, was elected president on 29 December 1989. At the start of November

¹⁷⁴ Kochemasov, *Meine letzte Mission*, 199–201.

¹⁷⁵ "Zapis' telefonnogo razgovora M. S. Gorbacheva s G. Kolem, 11 noyabrya 1989 god.," Transcript of Conversation (Secret), 11 November 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 8841.

¹⁷⁶ Diary Entry for 10 November 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 816–17.

1989, a modicum of uncertainty had still existed about the duration of Communism in Eastern Europe, but by the end of the month there was no longer any doubt that the Soviet bloc was irrevocably in tatters. Never before had political change of such colossal magnitude occurred so quickly with almost no bloodshed.

In January 1989, at a commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of the theologian and rebel leader Thomas Müntzer, Erich Honecker had declared that “the [Berlin] Wall will be standing in 50 and even in 100 years, if the reasons for it are not yet removed” (*Die Mauer wird in 50 und auch in 100 Jahren noch bestehen bleiben, wenn die dazu vorhandenen Gründe noch nicht beseitigt sind*).¹⁷⁷ What Honecker (and others) did not foresee is that the “reasons for it” would be “removed” before the year was out.

Aftermath

By presiding over the demise of the Communist bloc, Gorbachev vastly improved the climate for East-West relations (including East-West trade) and eliminated the perceived burden that Eastern Europe had long imposed on Soviet economic and military resources.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ “Erklärung von Erich Honecker über den Fortbestand der Berliner Mauer, 19.1.1989,” audio recording of Honecker’s speech, 19 January 1989, in the superb audio collection, *Die Mauer fällt: Die Wende in Deutschland vom Januar 1989 bis zum 3. Oktober 1990*, assembled by Walter Roller for the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Frankfurt am Main.

¹⁷⁸ The impact on East-West relations is highlighted in memoirs by former key Western officials: George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998); James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995); Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*; Helmut Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, ed. by Kai Diekmann and Ralf Georg Reuth (Berlin: Propyläen, 1996); Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995); and Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993). See also the new memoir by the Soviet ambassador in Washington from 1986 to 1990, Yurii Dubinin, *Vremya peremen: Zapiski posla SShA* (Moscow: Aviarus-XXI, 2003).

He also removed a major impediment to his program of domestic reform. Whereas previous Soviet leaders were wont to invoke the concepts of “socialist internationalism” and a “socialist commonwealth” to confer “legitimacy” on the traditional Marxist-Leninist model, Gorbachev and his aides could point to the developments in Eastern Europe as evidence of the model’s bankruptcy. Yakovlev, for example, argued in November 1989 that the upheavals in Hungary, Poland, East Germany, and Bulgaria “pose a threat to no one, except, perhaps, to the countries that have not yet gone through the process of democratization.”¹⁷⁹ Another of Gorbachev’s aides, Sergei Karaganov, stressed in early 1990 that “the changes in the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Romania have provided a potent push for perestroika. ... They have strengthened its irreversibility and showed that there is no reasonable alternative to the democratization of the political system and the marketization of the economy.”¹⁸⁰ The upheavals in the East-bloc countries thereby negated a key external prop on which Gorbachev’s opponents in Moscow might have relied. In all these respects, the dissolution of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe was highly beneficial for the Soviet leader.

At the same time, Gorbachev’s policy, for all its positive aspects, was fraught with severe costs. The historian Vyacheslav Dashichev has rightly observed that “no one in the Soviet Union – neither Gorbachev nor the ruling political elite nor the wider Soviet society – was ready, either psychologically or conceptually, for the fundamental turnaround that occurred.”¹⁸¹ By late 1990, the Soviet Union was unable to salvage what little remained of its political and military leverage in Eastern Europe. Even before the Warsaw Pact was formally abolished in July 1991, the erstwhile effectiveness of the alliance had disappeared. The fundamental political changes that occurred in Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990—changes that the Warsaw Pact in earlier decades was supposed to prevent, especially in the GDR—deprived the alliance of its main *raison d’être*. Soviet officials themselves privately acknowledged in

¹⁷⁹ TASS, 16 November 1989.

¹⁸⁰ Sergei A. Karaganov, “The Year of Europe: A Soviet View,” *Survival* vol. 32, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 122.

¹⁸¹ V. Dashichev, “Edinaya Germaniya v edinoi Evrope,” *Svobodnaya mysl’* 7 (Moscow, July 1999): 119.

early 1990 that the collapse of Communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe had “shifted the military balance on the European continent in favor of the West.”¹⁸² Some in Moscow concluded at an early stage that the shift in the military balance was “fundamental” and “decisive,” especially with the prospect of a unified Germany in NATO. Other Soviet officials initially hoped that the Soviet Union could “minimize [its] ‘losses’” by “promoting the formation of an all-European security system” that would supplant both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.¹⁸³ It soon became clear, however, that no such system would ever actually materialize.

Instead, the Warsaw Pact rapidly disintegrated, leaving NATO as the only security organization in Europe. The elaborate command-and-control infrastructure that Soviet leaders had worked so long to develop for the Pact became defunct, and pressures quickly mounted for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops and weapons from the region.¹⁸⁴ In February 1990 the Soviet Union agreed to remove its entire Central and Southern Groups of Forces from Czechoslovakia and Hungary by July 1991, a schedule that many Soviet military officers believed was too compressed.¹⁸⁵ Marshal Viktor Kulikov, who had served as commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact until February 1989, later recalled

¹⁸² “Voenno-politicheskie aspekty obstanovki v Evrope (Analiticheskaya zapiska),” prepared by the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s Directorate on Arms Control and Disarmament, n.d. (c. early March 1990), in AGF, F. 2, Op. 2, D. 12, Ll. 1-16.

¹⁸³ Ibid., Ll. 1, 2.

¹⁸⁴ S. F. Akhromeev and G. M. Kornienko, *Glazami marshala i diplomata* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1992), 295.

¹⁸⁵ “Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel’stvom Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik i Pravitel’stvom Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki o vyvode sovetskikh voisk s territorii Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki,” *Vestnik Ministerstva inostrannykh del SSSR* (Moscow), No. 6 (31 March 1990): 4-5; and “Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitsl’stvom Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik i Pravitel’stvom Vengerskoi Respubliki o vyvode sovetskikh voisk, vremenno nakhodyashchikhsya na territorii Vengrii,” 9 March 1990, supplement to “Postanovlenie TsK KPSS: O vyvode sovetskikh voisk iz Vengrii,” K-227/OS (Secret), 9 March 1990, 10-13, in RGANI, F. 89, Per. 8, D. 21, Ll. 1-8. The Hungarian and Czechoslovak governments initially had pressed for the withdrawals to be completed by the end of 1990. Only with reluctance did they settle for the mid-1991 deadline.

the bitterness that he and other military commanders had felt about the pace of the withdrawals:

To call it a give-away is putting it far too mildly. I would say it bordered on criminality. The decision to pull troops so quickly out of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and especially Germany was rash and ill-conceived. The officer corps was left in a disastrous state, bereft of housing, material support, and the right to a new job. Everything was done in a slapdash manner. ... I have to acknowledge that [we in] the military leadership were too docile; we were not perseverant enough and failed to insist that our troops should be pulled out in an orderly manner, with adequate support for our armed forces, the officer corps, and their families.¹⁸⁶

Despite these sentiments (which some Soviet military officers voiced in public), the withdrawals from Hungary and Czechoslovakia proceeded with great alacrity over the next sixteen months, finishing slightly ahead of schedule. A provisional agreement regarding the Soviet Union's Northern Group of Forces was concluded with the Polish government in October 1991, and it was then reaffirmed in a formal Russian-Polish treaty in May 1992. Under that treaty, all combat soldiers from the ex-Soviet Army were taken out of Poland by the end of October 1992, and the small number of remaining logistical troops departed by September 1993.¹⁸⁷ The withdrawal of several hundred thousand Soviet/Russian troops and support personnel from eastern Germany was completed in September 1994, four months ahead of the timetable laid out in treaties signed by the Soviet and German governments a few weeks before German reunification in the fall of 1990.¹⁸⁸ The final pullout of forces from German territory put an end to the

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Kulikov in Ekaterina Labetskaya, "Marshal Kulikov: 'Voennye byli slishkom poslushnymi,'" *Vremya MN* (Moscow), 6 September 1999, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Marek Henzler and Włodzimierz Kalski, "Wychali: Armia Radziecka z nami od dziecka," *Polityka* 39 (Warsaw, 25 September 1993): 12–13.

¹⁸⁸ "Dogovor ob okonchatel'nom uregulirovanii v otnoshenii Germanii," *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 13 September 1990), 4.

presence of the former Soviet Army in Eastern Europe, thus completing the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact.

The fate of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was no better. Although most of the East European states after 1989 still relied heavily on the Soviet Union for trade and energy supplies (both natural gas and oil) and many raw materials, the inexorable trend in the region was toward much greater economic contact with the West. The new East European governments looked upon CMEA as a cumbersome, antiquated organization that should be abolished, and they drafted formal proposals to that effect. Soviet leaders, too, soon acknowledged that the organization had never come close to living up to its stated aims and that its erstwhile functions had been overtaken by events.¹⁸⁹ Even if the Soviet government had tried—very belatedly—to implement drastic reforms in CMEA, the organization was doomed by the upheavals of 1989-1990. Hence, like the Warsaw Pact, it was formally disbanded in mid-1991.

In all these ways, events in Eastern Europe moved so far and so fast, and the Soviet Union's influence in the region declined so precipitously, that the fate of the whole continent eluded Soviet control. The very notion of a "socialist commonwealth" lost its meaning once Gorbachev not only permitted, but actually facilitated, the collapse of Communist rule in Eastern Europe. Hopes of "reforming" or "adapting" the structures that had undergirded Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, or of replacing them with an "all-European security system," proved illusory. Despite gaining certain benefits from the disintegration of the bloc, Gorbachev found that the steady elimination of all remnants of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe undercut his political fortunes and cast doubt on the long-term viability of the USSR.

Conclusion

Gorbachev did not come to office intending to abandon the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, nor did he foresee that the changes he initiated both domestically and externally would lead to the demise of Communism

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, A. Shabalin, "Ekonomika vostochnoevropeiskikh stran: Mify i real'nost'," *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik* (Moscow, 14 April 1990): 8-9.

in Eastern Europe. He had never anticipated that Communist rule in Eastern Europe would simply dissolve. On the contrary, he believed that his program would strengthen rather than undermine the socialist camp, placing it on a much sounder footing than in the past. He hoped to preserve the integrity of the Warsaw Pact and other multilateral institutions and to create favorable conditions in Eastern Europe for a liberalized form of Communism (“socialism with a human face”) that would enable the socialist commonwealth to overcome the destabilizing political crises that had plagued it so often in the past.

But the problem for Gorbachev was that his approach to Eastern Europe was based on conflicting objectives. Even though he wanted to buttress Soviet ties with the other Warsaw Pact countries and to encourage movement toward reformist Communism, his paramount goal by 1989 was to avoid the use of military force in Eastern Europe if internal crises arose there. Well into 1989, considerable uncertainty persisted in Eastern Europe about Soviet intentions and the bounds of Soviet tolerance, but when “life itself” (to use one of Gorbachev’s pet phrases) increasingly showed that the Soviet Union in fact had no intention of intervening militarily in any of the Warsaw Pact countries no matter what the provocation, pro-democracy elites and millions of ordinary people in Eastern Europe took matters into their own hands. Even when the process of change in the region developed a revolutionary momentum, Gorbachev declined to interrupt it or even to try to slow it down. He consistently stuck to his policy of avoiding the use of military force in Eastern Europe. Hardline Communist leaders in the Soviet-bloc countries, who would have been perfectly willing to rely on violent repression to quell mass unrest as the Chinese regime did, lost their will to do so when they finally concluded that the Soviet Union would not be backing them up.

These converging trends—from above, from below, and from outside—produced an outcome in Eastern Europe that Gorbachev had neither desired nor anticipated. The upheavals of 1989 transformed the region so completely that they eliminated Soviet influence. The Warsaw Pact and other Soviet-led organizations ceased to function in any meaningful way after 1989 and were soon abolished, a fate that rarely happens to an international organization even after it becomes dysfunctional. Gorbachev’s foreign policy adviser Anatolii Chernyaev was not quite right when he wrote in his diary in early October 1989

that events in Eastern Europe were leading to “the total dismantling of socialism as a world phenomenon.”¹⁹⁰ In fact, Communist regimes in China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba survived the distant upheavals of 1989 and subsequently fended off all pressure for political liberalization. Nonetheless, even though a handful of Communist regimes outside Europe proved resilient, Chernyaev’s point was fully apt about Eastern Europe and later the USSR (and also Mongolia). Chernyaev in his diary contended that the dissolution of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe was, “truth be told, an inevitable and good” process that would return “humanity to foundations of common sense.”¹⁹¹ Gorbachev himself clearly did not view things in as positive a light, but he accepted the outcome and tried to make the best of it.

Even though Gorbachev prior to 1989 did not anticipate that Communist rule would disintegrate in Eastern Europe or that the reunification of Germany would suddenly loom large on the East-West agenda, his basic approach to Soviet-East European relations proved remarkably successful in averting mass violent turmoil. Had it been left to the East German or Czechoslovak authorities in the fall of 1989, Tiananmen-style repression would have resulted and would have severely complicated the situation for the Soviet Union. The lack of violence was attributable in part to the remarkable discipline shown by East European protesters, in part to the eroding will of East European leaders who in earlier years would have forcibly crushed unrest, and in part to the deliberate policies adopted by Moscow. Throughout the latter half of 1989 (and even earlier in Poland and Hungary), the Soviet Union took timely and effective action to forestall violence and promote liberalization in the Warsaw Pact countries. At each of the many points when the Soviet Union could have stepped in to halt or reverse the process of fundamental change in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev instead expedited it, sometimes deliberately and on other occasions inadvertently. By eliminating any prospect that the Soviet Union would use military force in Eastern Europe, he effectively deprived the hard-line East European Communist leaders of the option of violent repression.

¹⁹⁰ Diary Entry for 5 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 806.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

The one notable exception of Romania, with its bloody and chaotic revolution *cum coup d'état*, merely proves the rule.¹⁹² From the mid-1960s on, Soviet influence in Romania had always been much weaker than in the other Warsaw Pact countries. If the Soviet Union had been able to maintain the same degree of influence in Romania that it enjoyed elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the violent rebellion of December 1989 might not have occurred. The Romanian crisis was illuminating in its own right, however, insofar as it underscored the lengths Gorbachev was willing to go to avoid Soviet military intervention in Eastern Europe. Despite serious provocations by the forces loyal to Nicolae Ceaușescu, including the firing of shots at the Soviet embassy in Bucharest and threats by the Romanian Securitate to blow up nuclear power stations near the Soviet border, and despite explicit statements by the U.S. and other Western governments that they would *welcome* Soviet intervention in Romania, Soviet leaders refrained from sending in any troops.¹⁹³ Indeed, newly declassified documents confirm that Gorbachev was so determined to avoid the use of military force in Eastern Europe that he did not even seriously broach such a step when the CPSU Politburo gathered at the height of the Romanian crisis to discuss what to do.¹⁹⁴

Gorbachev's fundamental reorientation of Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe encompassed not only his success in getting the CPSU Politburo to decide in March 1989 to eschew any use of military pressure and force in the region, but also his role in promoting

¹⁹² For a solidly researched, perspicuous account of the Romanian crisis, see Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of 1989* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹⁹³ Thomas L. Friedman, "Baker Gives U.S. Approval If Soviets Act on Rumania," *The New York Times*, 25 December 1989, 6; and Steven Greenhouse, "France Offers Aid to Ceaușescu Foes," *The New York Times*, 25 December 1989, 6.

¹⁹⁴ "Vypiska iz protokola No. 175 zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 23 dekabrya 1989 god.: O pervoocherednykh merakh v svyazi s obstanovkoi v Rumynii," CPSU Politburo Discussion No. P175/50 (Top Secret), 23 December 1989, in RGANI, F. 89, Op.8, D. 77, Ll. 1-3. See also "Postanovlenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS No. P175/61 'O napravlenii pozdravlenii novym rukovodityelam Rumynii,'" CPSU Politburo Resolution No. P175/61 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 3, Op. 103, D. 192, Ll. 2, 26-27, 144-5.

far-reaching liberalization. In addition to tolerating drastic changes in the Warsaw Pact countries, Gorbachev helped to bring about those changes, indirectly in some cases and directly in others, as when he pushed for a new direction and change of party leadership in the GDR in October 1989. Gorbachev had pledged in mid-1988 that the Soviet Union “would not impose [its] methods of development,” including perestroika and glasnost, “on anyone else,” but the situation in Eastern Europe was so volatile and was changing so rapidly by early to mid-1989 that it necessitated greater Soviet involvement than he initially anticipated.¹⁹⁵ Valentin Falin, who as head of the CPSU International Department oversaw Soviet relations with Eastern Europe during this crucial period, later acknowledged:

The CPSU Central Committee was aware of the unsavory processes under way in the [East European] countries and therefore – to the extent permitted by the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and respect of the right of peoples to choose – we tried to influence the situation.¹⁹⁶

Unlike in the past, when Gorbachev’s predecessors relied on military force to “defend socialist gains” in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union in 1989 tried to do what it could to counteract the “unsavory processes” that might eventually have triggered widespread violent upheavals in one or more of the Warsaw Pact countries.

The dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the opening of the Berlin Wall were by no means inevitable. Momentous historical phenomena often seem inevitable in retrospect, but the reality is bound to be more complex. Gorbachev did have choices to make in 1989; nothing was preordained. If he had been determined to uphold orthodox Communist rule in Eastern Europe, as his predecessors were, he undoubtedly could have succeeded. The Soviet Army in the late 1980s was still fully capable of enforcing the Brezhnev Doctrine, provided that Soviet political leaders were willing to shed blood. If the top post

¹⁹⁵ “Otvety M. S. Gorbacheva na voprosy gazety ‘Vashington post’ i zhurnala ‘N’yusuk,’” *Pravda* (Moscow, 23 May 1988), 2.

¹⁹⁶ “XXVIII S’ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 9 July 1990), 5.

in the CPSU in March 1985 had gone to a hardline Politburo member such as Viktor Grishin, Grigorii Romanov, or Nikolai Tikhonov instead of Gorbachev, the Brezhnev Doctrine undoubtedly would have remained in full force. It is inconceivable that Grishin, Romanov, or Tikhonov—all of whom nearly outflanked Gorbachev in 1985—would have even contemplated a drastic change of policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe or would have refrained from using military force if necessary to keep the Soviet bloc intact.

The peaceful disintegration of the bloc was the unintended consequence of Gorbachev's reorientation of Soviet domestic priorities—a reorientation aimed at “laying to rest all remnants of Stalinism and starting the Soviet Union on its way to the twentieth century.” This was the phrasing used by Adam Ulam in an interview for Radio Free Europe in May 1975, ten years before Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU. Ulam was speculating about what would happen if “ten years from now, some individual or group in the [Soviet] Politburo emerges with the avowed intent” of doing away with the Stalinist legacy in the USSR:

Modernization, rationalization, economic reform, political relaxation, and the proper observance of the Soviet Constitution would follow. In the political and cultural climate created by such a change, I cannot see how Romanian, Polish, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian claims for independence could be resisted.¹⁹⁷

To be sure, in 1975 neither Ulam nor anyone else expected a figure like Gorbachev to come to power in Moscow ten years later. But what Ulam did correctly foresee is that any Soviet leader who was truly intent on extirpating the Stalinist residue at home would have to be willing to implement drastic changes in policy toward Eastern Europe. Far-reaching political liberalization and much greater openness within the USSR would have been incompatible with, and eventually would have been undermined by, a policy requiring military intervention on behalf of Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe. As Ulam rightly

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Adam B. Ulam, May 1975, RFE/RL Research Institute, verbatim transcript in Open Society Archives (Budapest), F. 8, Subfond 200, Series 8, Subject File, Interview—Ulam, Adam B.

predicted, a fundamental reorientation of Soviet domestic priorities toward democratization, public accountability, and a relatively free press necessitated the relinquishment of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe.

By the end of 1989, the pace and scope of events in Eastern Europe had greatly outstripped Gorbachev's expectations. Millions of people in the region had decided that the opportunity for drastic political change was finally at hand, and they took full advantage of it. Two years later, the USSR ceased to exist, and over the next decade-and-a-half all of the East European countries except for a few of the former Yugoslav states (and excluding the former Soviet republics other than the three Baltic countries) were integrated into NATO and the European Union. Numerous problems persisted in the region, both economic and political, but the upheavals of 1989 brought lasting improvements, above all the spread of democratic polities and free-market economies. The combination in 1989 of reform from above, pressure from below, and sheer luck produced some of the most propitious and memorable events of the twentieth century.

VLADISLAV ZUBOK

Gorbachev and the Road to 1989

In 2009 the countries of Eastern Europe celebrated twenty years of independence from the Soviet empire and of peaceful liberation from communism. Significant amounts of new archival information and historical accounts have emerged during those twenty years. Still, a true international history of 1989 has yet to be written, and the domino effects of that amazing year need to be studied further.¹ For many Eastern European politicians and intellectuals, from Warsaw to Sofia, the euphoria of the revolutions quickly gave way to new circumstances, needs and problems. Eastern European states' paramount national interest—successfully met—was to join NATO and the European Union, and to integrate their economies with Western Europe. At the same time, they, consciously or unconsciously, built a temporal and geopolitical wall between themselves and the post-Soviet space—seeking to “Europeanize” their recent experience and adapt its interpretations to the current agenda. This contributed to a certain one-sidedness in the dominant Eastern European narratives about 1989. Everything concerning the Western factors receives privileged treatment; anything concerning the Soviet factors receives scanty treatment, is reduced to KGB manipulations, or is not mentioned at all. The role of the Western powers, especially of the Bush Administration, despite

¹ On the synergy of the revolutions of 1989 and the “spillover” effects see: Mark Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union,” published in three parts in the *Journal of Cold War History* vol. 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003); vol. 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004); vol. 7, no. 1 (Winter 2007); also Timothy Garton Ash, “1989!” in *The New York Review of Books* vol. 56, no. 17 (November 5, 2009): 4–8.

their less than enthusiastic attitudes towards the 1989 revolutions, gets an undeservedly prominent place in the narratives. By contrast, the same narratives treat the place of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost as marginal at best for Eastern European developments.²

In Russia, political biases and partisan viewpoints also distort the interpretations of 1989. Gorbachev's admirers and supporters claim that the Soviet non-use of force and support of the changes in Central Europe was a logical part of Gorbachev's strategy to build a "common European home" and accomplish democratization of the USSR.³ Gorbachev's critics regard the sudden collapse of Soviet geopolitical positions in Eastern Europe as a case of "criminal negligence," and even of Gorbachev's treason. The political and social climate in Russia in the 2000s favored the critics. A school textbook, recommended by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science, explains that Mikhail Gorbachev had surrendered the Soviet positions without security guarantees, and the expansion of NATO had "made it imperative for Moscow to pursue a more ambitious foreign policy in the post-Soviet space."⁴ These partisan accounts fail to explain the dynamics of Soviet behavior in 1989. Gorbachev's admirers do not sufficiently address his lack of interest in the future of the Warsaw Pact and CMEA, or his procrastination about the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern European countries. And Gorbachev's critics have never explained what strategies would have prevented the "loss" of Eastern Europe or

² The best-known attempt to redress this imbalance in Western literature is undertaken by Mark Kramer. See his "Gorbachev and the Demise of East European Communism," in Silvio Pons and Federico Romero, eds., *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War. Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 187–92.

³ Anatoly Chernaev, *Shest Let s Gorbachevim* (Moscow: Progress-Kultura, 1993); Georgy Shakhnazarov, *Tsena Svobody: Reformatsiya Gorbacheva glazami ego pomoshchnika* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994); Vadim Medvedev, *Raspad: Kak on nazreval v 'mirovoi sisteme sotsializma'* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994); Alexandr Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniya bytiya: Perestroika – Nadezhdy I real'nosti* (Moscow: Novostki, 1991); Eduard Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor v zashchitu demokratiï I svobody* (Moscow: Novosti, 1991). For criticism of this, as "ex post facto rationalization," see K.N. Brutents, *Nesbyvsheesia. Neravnodushnyie zametki o perestroika* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2005).

⁴ A.A. Danilov, *Istoriia Rissii, 1945–2008* (Moscow: Prosveshcheniie, 2008).

at least made this loss more advantageous to Soviet interests. Above all, both sides do not sufficiently address a crucial linkage between the perestroika politics and the developments in Eastern Europe.⁵

As a result, the Soviet role in 1989, despite several important attempts to address this issue, remains understudied and marginalized.⁶ Even the best-informed American observers were perplexed when they attempted to analyze Soviet behavior towards Eastern Europe in 1988–1989.⁷ Jack Matlock, the U.S. ambassador in Moscow at the time, frankly admitted in 1999 that it was a complete surprise for him that Gorbachev “was not willing to use force” to protect Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

I had a chance to write about this topic ten years earlier, and more recently reengaged it in my book *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). In this essay, I want to revisit the well-known evidence, but also take a look at the numerous important documents that came to light, including the minutes of the Politburo and the

⁵ See Valery Boldin, *Collapse of the Pedestal. Details for M.S. Gorbachev's Portrait* (Moscow: Republic, 1995) and its English-language version *Ten Years that Shook the World. The Gorbachev Era as Witnessed by His Chief of Staff* (New York, Basic Books, 1994); Vladimir Kryuchkov, *A Personal File* (Moscow, Olympus, 1997); Leonid V. Shebarshin, *Zapiski nachalnika razvedki* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994); Nikolai S. Leonov, *Likholetie* (Moscow: Terra, 1997); Valentin Falin, *Die Politische Erinnerungen* (Munchen: Droemer-Knaur, 1993) and his “Die Perestroika und der Zerfall der Sowjetunion,” in: *Hamburgerbeitraege zur Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik*, Heft 77 (Hamburg, April 1993); Juli Kwitzinskij, *Vor der Sturm: Erinnerungen eines Diplomaten* [On the eve of the storm: memoirs of a diplomat] (Berlin: Siedler, 1993).

⁶ The best of these early studies was by Jacques Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989. The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). More recently, the issue was addressed in Svetlana Savranskaia, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History. The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010).

⁷ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

diaries of Gorbachev's advisers.⁸ First, I will discuss how Gorbachev and his reform-minded entourage de-legitimized the revolutionary-imperial paradigm that for decades called for Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Then, I will analyze the ad-hoc nature of Gorbachev's response to the shifting ground and the unexpectedly rapid changes in Eastern Europe. I will draw particular attention to the "new thinking" vision of Gorbachev and his reform-oriented entourage that led them to rely on the cooperation and good will of the West. I will also bring up the role of the Soviet domestic crisis, financial and political, that distracted Gorbachev from Eastern European affairs. Finally, I will discuss Gorbachev's peculiar personality that contributed to surprising ad-hoc attitudes with regard to the changes in Eastern Europe, but ultimately guaranteed peaceful outcome of those changes.

Gorbachev and Eastern Europe in 1985–88

Even before Gorbachev came to power, astute Western observers knew that the Soviet relationship with Eastern European clients was in a profound structural crisis. In one of the best analyses of that time, derived ironically from a neo-Marxist "world systems" perspective, American political scientist Valerie Bunce noticed that Eastern Europe transformed during the 1960s and 1970s from the "ideal" empire of

⁸ This paper draws in particular on the documentation in Svetlana Savranskaia et al., *Masterpieces of History* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010); A. Chernyaev, A. Veber, V. Medvedev, eds., *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS...Po zapisiam Anatolia Cherniaeva, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgia Shakhnazarova (1985–1991)* (Moscow: Alpina Biznes Books, 2006); A. Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod. Dnevnik dvukh epoch, 1972–1991 gody* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008); Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Perestroika: 1985–1991. Neizdannoe, maloizvestnoie, zabytoe* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond 'Demokratiia', 2008); also Vitalii Vorotnikov, *A bylo eto tak: Iz dnevnika chlena Politbyuro TsK KPSS [As It Happened: From the Diary of a member of the CC CPSU Politburo]* (Moscow: Sovet veteranov knigoizdaniya SI-MAR, 1995). I also used transcripts of the interviews with Soviet officials produced by the Oral History Project on the End of the Cold War in collaboration with Oleg Skvortsov. Transcripts of these interviews are in my personal archive, and on file at the Institute of General History, Academy of Science, Moscow, and at the National Security Archive, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

Stalinist times into a major burden. The very political dependence of the communist regimes on Moscow became a major source of their bargaining power, the leverage in demanding subsidies, loans, and concessions from the USSR to satisfy the growing demands of Eastern European workers. This could temporarily guarantee their stability, but Moscow had to grant them the appearance of autonomy, to boost their “national” credentials and domestic legitimacy. Because of the failure to create mutually profitable trade among the Warsaw Pact member-states, economic relations inside the bloc remained guided by the client-vassals model, and subsidizing the communist regimes in Eastern Europe increasingly became a drain on Soviet financial reserves, especially on valuable hard currency. As the Polish crisis of 1980–81 clearly demonstrated, the choice between subsidizing Eastern Europe and propping the sagging living standards of the Soviet population became a zero-sum game for the Kremlin leadership. To relieve this burden, during the 1970s the Soviets had to allow Eastern European regimes to make profit and acquire debt on Western capitalist markets.⁹

Valerie Bunce succinctly concluded in her article, published in 1985, that, as a part of Soviet empire, Eastern Europe remained “still valuable,” but for Moscow it now offered “fewer assets, and many more liabilities.” If the value of the empire, she continued, “is based on the degree to which the colonies help the colonial state achieve its central objectives of economic growth, national security, and domestic political support and political stability, then the value of this empire has declined sharply over a relatively brief span of time.” Also, the Soviet Union found itself in the worst possible position: being the empire’s “core,” it did not benefit from the Eastern European “periphery”: instead, the entire Soviet bloc became the dependant “periphery of the global capitalist system.” In that precarious situation, the Kremlin had no benefits and carried all the risks—including the ultimate scenario of bailing out Eastern European regimes in case of their financial and political bankruptcy. And becoming the “periphery” of the volatile global economy made the Soviet empire extremely vul-

⁹ Valerie Bunce, “The Empire Strikes Back. The Evolution of the Eastern Bloc from a Soviet Asset to a Soviet Liability,” *International Organization* vol. 39, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 23, 28.

nerable to pressures of foreign debts and to price volatility of major commodities, such as oil.¹⁰

The crucial question here is: did the Gorbachev leadership in 1985 understand these structural problems and dangers with any degree of clarity? Archival evidence indicates that the members of the old Politburo, including Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Mikhail Suslov, began to understand the situation and adapt Soviet policies to it.¹¹ This does not mean that they were at any point prepared to let Eastern Europe “go.” The Polish crisis stimulated discussions about the pros and cons of Soviet military intervention that raised the huge price of such an intervention, not only in terms of lives lost and international détente destroyed, but also in financial terms: the Soviet Union simply could not afford to shoulder the large Polish debt to Western banks. Instead, the Kremlin preferred to remain in a tacit agreement with those banks, as they postponed the payment of the Polish debt, and continued to treat Soviet credit history as stellar. Such was the situation that Gorbachev and his entourage inherited. Returning to the Gorbachev leadership, there is no evidence that in 1985 or even in 1986-87 the Kremlin began to contemplate seriously how to change this volatile and perilous status quo. Everything we know today, including the obviously biased and self-serving information coming from Gorbachev himself and his loyalists, says that the Kremlin did not have any proactive policy in Eastern Europe, on the assumption that this region would remain stable. Andrei Grachev summed up this attitude as follows: “The apparent tranquility of the Eastern European scene suggested that, at least in the near future, there would be no unpleasant surprises for the new Soviet leader.”¹² This assumption was understandable, given other more urgent priorities, such as the tense relations with the United States, the war in Afghanistan, and festering domestic problems. At the same time, the choice of not doing *anything* with regard to Eastern Europe may

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, chapter 9.

¹² Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev's gamble. Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 114.

indicate more than just negligence. Why did the Kremlin let Eastern Europe slip to the bottom of its policy priorities? Why did even the Central Committee's "Polish Commission," created in 1980, seem to fall into a sleeping-mode (although, in fairness, its documents have not been studied and may contain surprises)?

Gorbachev's sympathizers and some historians provide one explanation: Gorbachev repudiated the Brezhnev doctrine already in 1985, when he came to power. He meticulously pursued the policy of non-interference in Eastern European affairs as a logical consequence of such a doctrinal shift.¹³ Many, however, are not convinced by this explanation. Until 1988, Gorbachev consistently refused to revise the Brezhnev doctrine publicly, and address its consequences. For instance, he sorely disappointed all communist reformers and his Eastern European sympathizers when in April 1987, during his official visit to Czechoslovakia, he subscribed to the policies of "normalization" after Soviet invasion of 1968. Also, in 1985–88, the General Secretary did not approve proposals to start withdrawing Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia. By doing this, Gorbachev de facto reaffirmed the Brezhnev doctrine; such was at least the strong impression of many Eastern Europeans.¹⁴

However, to ascribe to Gorbachev the intention to leave Eastern Europe alone in 1985–88 is also wrong, because the General Secretary was still not a quasi-Wilsonian liberal democrat at that time – he would move towards this creed only in 1989–90. Gorbachev himself and his reformist entourage did not conceive and pursue perestroika as a liberal-democratic endeavor, at least not until 1989. Gorbachev's perestroika was a highly ambitious and ideological project – an attempt to emulate a highly idealized Leninist revolution using the power of a gigantic party-state apparatus to "cleanse" the Soviet state, society, and economy from the legacy of Stalin and Brezhnev.¹⁵ Gorbachev's neo-Leninism played

¹³ See, for instance, Svetlana Savranskaia, "The Logic of 1989: The Soviet Peaceful Withdrawal from Eastern Europe," in *Masterpieces*, 1–18.

¹⁴ Medvedev, "Raspad," 14–150; Savranskaia, *Op. cit.*, 9; Georgy Shakhnazarov proposed a partial withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia in his memorandum to the leadership in March 1987, in *Masterpieces*, 244–46.

¹⁵ The liberal-reformist perspective on Gorbachev is best represented by Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), and also his *Seven Years That Changed the World. Perestroika in*

a crucial role in his choices for one reformist tack after another: after “acceleration” came glasnost, and then experimentation with “controlled democracy.” It is important that Gorbachev—initially supported by the KGB, the military, and the military-industrial complex, as well as the party’s nomenklatura—quickly began to lean towards a small minority of his advisers, the so-called “enlightened” apparatchiks, who were prone – as part of the Soviet intelligentsia – to grand ideas and sweeping generalizations. It was this milieu that became the main generator of the “new thinking,” an extremely vague notion that primarily meant the rejection of the old ideological approaches. The small group of “new thinkers” around Gorbachev included Alexander Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, Anatoly Chernyaev, Vadim Zagladin, Georgy Shakhnazarov, and much later Vadim Medvedev. The primary common features of this group were high educational standards, an attentiveness to ideology and ideas in general, and an “internationalist” outlook (with perhaps the exception of Shevardnadze). In Soviet conditions, it gave them a greater political horizon, but also linked them to a broad range of ideological and moral issues that concerned Soviet intelligentsia after Stalin’s death, and in particular after the 20th congress of the CPSU that split the party and the educated society on the issues of Stalinism, its place in Soviet history, and its relationship to the revolution and Soviet socialism. The “new thinkers” were mostly anti-Stalinists who believed that the “socialist project” had been corrupted by Stalinist totalitarianism. Hence, they viewed the main direction of reforms as a “return to socialism,” the construction of “socialism with a human face”—the generational myth that had been validated by the brief experiment of the Prague spring in 1968.¹⁶

Perspective (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); see also Jacques Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989*. A good analysis of Gorbachev and his reform as a “socialist revolution” can be found in Stephen E. Hanson, *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) and Ken Jowitt, “Really Imaginary Socialism,” *East European Constitutional Review* vol. 6, no. 2/3 (Spring-Summer 1997): 45.

¹⁶ See more on Gorbachev’s generational profile in my book: *Zhivago’s Children. The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). On the Westernizing and other influences see Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals*

Gorbachev's neo-Leninist reformist ambitions, colored by the humanist "new thinking," increasingly affected his policies and defined his views on Eastern Europe.¹⁷ At first, however, caution prevailed over ideology in domestic and foreign policies. As Gorbachev embarked on the ambitious plans of "acceleration" (modernization) of the Soviet industrial base, he did not yet recognize the fundamental systemic problems that would thwart such a course. In the same mode, as even the most sympathetic commentators admit, he refused to see Eastern Europe as just a liability for Soviet reforms, as an "imperial burden" that jeopardized Soviet finances and complicated foreign policy. His memoirs and even existing records are extremely vague on this issue. One may suppose, however, that in 1985-87, Gorbachev, as the ideological neo-Leninist reformer, seemed to view Eastern Europe as the place where "socialism" (e.g., the "socialism with a human face") could be transformed and rescued. Yet, the future of Eastern European socialism depended on the success of reforms in the Soviet Union. Until those reforms succeeded, it was futile and even dangerous to rock the boats in Eastern Europe. From Gorbachev's speeches at the Politburo (extended and contradictory monologues), we can deduce that he saw the problem of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe primarily in economic terms. At the Politburo in 1986-87, Gorbachev repeatedly identified the main problem of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) as insufficient economic coordination. At the Politburo session on March 10, 1988, he still continued, at least in part, to adhere to this economist approach:

Our priority is political stability in the socialist countries. This is our vital interest, from the point of view of security as well. We need the goods from the socialist countries. And we bear our own

and the End of the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was no More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ The implications of this Leninist imitation have been explored by Ken Jowitt, *New World's Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) and Stephen E. Hanson, *Time and Revolution. Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

responsibility for socialism. In the economic sense, socialism has not passed the test of practice. Therefore we should hang on even though the situation is strangling us.

Gorbachev was torn between the deteriorating economic realities in the Soviet bloc and his ideological commitments. He continued: "We cannot isolate ourselves from CMEA. But what is to be done?" In 1985-88, the Soviet leader grabbed at a magic wand of the "scientific technical revolution": he hoped that a retooling of the CMEA technological base would "liberate [the socialist camp] from the need to purchase technology from the West. Consequently, this will free up hard currency."¹⁸ This utopian recipe did not remain entirely on paper. The Soviet Union pumped billions of rubles into technological modernization. There were costly attempts to create a computer industry in the GDR and software specialists in Bulgaria.

If Eastern Europe remained part of Gorbachev's ideological-political project of perestroika, why then did he pursue such a remarkable non-interference course? Again, the most popular explanation among Gorbachev's supporters lies in his beliefs, his "new thinking." In a speech before the Foreign Ministry's officials in May 1986 (written by Chernyaev and other assistants), Gorbachev encouraged them "to respect the dignity of [European] allies, including the small ones, to renounce the illusory stand of a teacher."¹⁹ The ideological and personal experiences of the "new thinkers" defined their spectrum of strategic dangers and political opportunities. For many of them, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Brezhnev doctrine of "limited sovereignty" of the bloc countries represented the fateful watershed that divided the reformist communism with which they had identified in their younger years, and Brezhnev's "stagnation" and partial relapse into Stalinist practices. The brutal end of the Prague Spring left their reformist dreams crushed, leaving some of them with a sense of guilt, since all of them continued their successful careers within the party nomenklatura. Shakhnazarov's proposal in 1987 to start the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia was in part dictated by

¹⁸ Savranskaia et al., *Masterpieces*, 266-67.

¹⁹ Shkhazarov at Musgrove, Transcript, 42.

this syndrome.²⁰ Yet, we know that not all “new thinkers” were inhibited in this way. In the same year, Vadim Medvedev and Alexander Yakovlev encouraged Gorbachev to take action as to the removal of Husak from power, as an obstacle to the process of “democratization.” In May 1988, the Politburo discussed the complicated situation in Hungary and sent Vladimir Kriuchkov, at that time deputy head of the KGB and head of foreign intelligence, to speak with Janos Kadar, to find out what was going on and possibly to manage the transition to Kadar’s successors.²¹

The absence of proactive Kremlin policies towards Eastern Europe in 1985–87 did not mean that the situation in Soviet empire was in stasis: quite the opposite. Several dynamic and fundamental developments occurred in 1986–88 that in the end produced the effect of complete de-legitimization of Soviet military and geopolitical influence in Eastern Europe. The first development was Gorbachev’s nuclear abolitionism, prodded by dramatic talks with Ronald Reagan and the Chernobyl disaster. Gorbachev had been concerned with a prospect of nuclear war from the very start of his administration, and took enormous effort to reach an agreement with the United States that a nuclear war should never be fought. After the Chernobyl disaster in April 1986, Gorbachev and his “new thinking” advisers quickly concluded that even conventional war in Europe was no longer possible, given the inevitability of nuclear disaster. At a summit in Reykjavik with Reagan, the Soviet leader pushed for a nuclear zero, and tried at the same time to torpedo the Strategic Defense Initiative. In the fall of 1986, the Kremlin pushed the reluctant military establishment to adopt a radically different military doctrine that renounced the goal of waging and winning a nuclear war and was based instead on the principles of “reasonable sufficiency” and “defensive” posture. There is no evidence that anyone in 1986–87 linked those changes to the future of Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, with the tacit recognition in the Kremlin that no war could take place in Europe, the Soviet empire lost its primary role as a geopolitical glacis from where Soviet troops could immediately or even preemptively counterattack NATO in case

²⁰ English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 114.

²¹ Vorotnikov, *A bylo eto tak*, 208, 209, 240.

of a war. Both Western Europe and Eastern Europe ceased to be hostages of a future nuclear war between the two superpowers.²²

The second development was glasnost, and its consequence – the quick erosion of the Soviet empire’s ideological foundations. During 1987–88, Soviet magazines and newspapers began to discuss Stalin’s crimes, as well as more recent controversial events, including the suppression of Hungary in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968.²³ For decades, the Soviet party apparatus had put brakes on a public discussion of historical events, because any questioning of the past was bound to lead to a dangerous destabilization in Eastern Europe. And this caution was well justified: the “spillover effect” of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization policies in 1956 was crucial for the emergence of the Polish and Hungarian revolutions. In 1987–88, the dynamics of “spillover” became vastly different. Nevertheless, from 1986 onwards, all changes in the Soviet Union were scrutinized by Eastern Europeans under a magnifying glass reaching as far back as thirty years. Already in April 1987, the expectations of the Czech crowd in Prague, during Gorbachev’s visit there, were high. This is why Gorbachev’s failure to meet them produced so much disappointment.

In March 1988, the Soviet leadership, including many Politburo members, fully realized that radical glasnost inside the Soviet Union had become a powerful factor of change. Historical revisionism, i.e. criticism of Stalin’s and Brezhnev’s policies, including Soviet interventions in Eastern Europe, became a transnational phenomenon. It rocked the boats in Eastern Europe, whether Gorbachev admitted it or not. Yegor Ligachev expressed it clearly:

Arguably, we will muddle through, and survive the attacks [by radical, anti-Stalinist forces in the Soviet mass media], but there are the socialist countries. ... What to do about them? Would we risk breaking apart this powerful support that has always existed side-by-side with our socialist countries? History has become pol-

²² See in my article, “Gorbachev’s Nuclear Learning,” *Boston Book Review* (April-May, 2000): 6–14, and *A Failed Empire*, 284–300.

²³ Vorotnikov, *A bylo eto tak*, 181.

itics and, when we deal with it, we should think not only about the past but also about the future.²⁴

Gorbachev made a resolute choice in favor of continuing radical glasnost, against the objections of Ligachev and other conservatives in the Politburo. This, however, meant that he could no longer count on tranquility and stability in Eastern Europe.

Another important development was the rapid aggravation of financial-economic problems in the USSR and the Soviet bloc, accelerated by Gorbachev's early policies and the precipitous fall of oil prices. Politburo records from the spring of 1987 and especially the spring of 1988 began to reflect the grave concerns of Soviet planners and finance officials. The budget revenues were falling disastrously. Simultaneously, the population incomes began to grow considerably as a result of a misconceived deregulation of salaries' mechanisms and the runaway escalation of state social commitments and subsidies. In April 1987, a finance expert told the Politburo that the "financial situation borders on a crisis situation." The surplus of unspent rubles in people's hands created a hidden runaway inflation and the disappearance of goods from state trade. Similar developments in 1960–62 led to food riots against Khrushchev and forced the Kremlin to import wheat. This time, Soviet reserves of hard currency and gold were dwindling; the supply-demand situation worsened by the day. In October 1987, the head of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai Ryzhkov, demanded an urgent set of measures: to reduce social programs and restore the balance of budget and trade. The Kremlin had to print 4 billions of rubles annually to make ends meet. Ryzhkov warned that in 1988 the USSR would have to pay 66 percent of all its hard currency revenues just to honor its foreign dept. Soviet subsidies, in oil and loans, to Eastern European countries continued at the rate of five-to-ten billion dollars annually. At the same time, the Soviet Union rapidly developed a big deficit in its trade with CMEA partners.²⁵

In March 1988, about the same time as Gorbachev had to make a choice in favor of glasnost, the Politburo had fully realized that

²⁴ Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, March 24, 1988, in: *Masterpieces*, 269.

²⁵ *V Politburo TsK KPSS*, 169, 242; Grachev citing Valery Musatov on Soviet subsidies, in: *Gorbachev's Gamble*, 116, 169.

Eastern Europe had become a financial and economic albatross to the Soviet Union. At the same session where Gorbachev spoke about the scientific-technical revolution as a solution for CMEA, he referred to the report by Vadim Medvedev on the gloomy situation in trade and financial balance with Eastern Europe. Nikolai Ryzhkov, the leading economist among the Politburo members, said: "We have no real trade with the socialist countries. We need a real market and currency convertibility." Ligachev warned about political consequences: "Some socialist countries are facing political upheavals. In Poland everything is moving in the direction of renunciation of the party." Gorbachev, despite his usual excessive optimism, had to acknowledge that "the situation is worsening, which threatens an aggravation of the socio-economic state. ... If the situation begins to crack, the very idea of socialism will be discredited."²⁶

These three developments de-legitimized the role of Eastern Europe as a jewel prize of the Soviet empire; indeed, they turned it into a liability. The realization of this paradigm shift, however, did not produce a coherent policy analysis comparable to the one produced by Valerie Bunce at the beginning of this article. The Politburo's ways of thinking were different from that of the American scholar. The transformation of Eastern Europe from a security prize into an economic albatross could only happen together with the erosion and rejection of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm that had guided Soviet international behavior during the previous decades. Gorbachev's neo-Leninism made the destruction of this paradigm ideologically and politically possible—but the process took almost three years, and could have been hardly shorter under Soviet circumstances.

One thing, however, became clear: the previous approach of non-interference to Eastern Europe had become increasingly obsolete and risky. One would expect the Kremlin, at this crucial moment, to have formulated some strategic priorities and options in which the future of Eastern Europe would be discussed. The new political situation seemed to leave Gorbachev two options: One, the most troubling and disastrous, was to prepare for the use of force (or the threat of force) to

²⁶ Notes of CC PCSU Politburo session, March 10, 1988, in *Masterpieces*, 266, 267.

preserve stability in Eastern Europe. The other was some kind of proactive strategy to preempt violence and the use of force, and instead to guide the forces, reawakened by Gorbachev's promise. Gorbachev, as it turned out, was not ready for any of these choices. His strategic priorities and options made him shift his political focus even further away from Eastern Europe.

Gorbachev's "Common European Home" and Eastern Europe

1988 marked a major shift in Gorbachev's vision towards the "common European home." This shift reflected his realization that domestic reforms had run into grave problems. One exit from the looming deadlock was energetic policies to end the Cold War and to reach reconciliation with the West—the United States and *Western* Europe. These policies emerged, driven by general vision of a "common European home." French historian Marie-Pierre Rey has aptly reconstructed the evolution of this new concept from its inception.²⁷ But what was the strategy behind this concept? Western Cold War realists, from Henry Kissinger to Brent Scowcroft, feared that such a strategy existed, considering that it meant to undermine NATO. We now know that Gorbachev's intentions were completely different. He wanted to cut the whole Gordian knot—the Cold War with the West, the burden of Soviet commitments in Eastern Europe, and the domestic Soviet transformation and modernization—by creating a new community from Vancouver to Vladivostok. In July 1988, at a dinner with Polish leader Wojciech Jaruzelsky, the man whom Gorbachev trusted and respected, the Soviet leader spoke about "what content we invest into the concept of a common European home." He spoke about "a continuous process of disarmament – nuclear, chemical, and conventional," that could remove the roadblocks to European integration. At the end of the road he saw the liquidation of NATO and the Warsaw pact. He also spoke about "a breakthrough in developing eco-

²⁷ Marie-Pierre Rey, "'Europe is Our Common Home': A Study of Gorbachev's Diplomatic Concept," *Cold War History* vol. 4, no. 2 (January 2004): 33–65; see also Savranskaia, "The Logic of 1989," 18–22.

conomic collaboration between the two sides of the continent.” The goal “could be all-European economic integration.”²⁸ Gorbachev’s speech at the United Nations in December 1988 carried a messianic message to the world. By that time, the thrust of Gorbachev’s foreign policy was directed at reaching a new partnership with the United States and Western Europe in order to expand the Soviet domestic perestroika into a much bolder international integrationist project.

It is difficult, and perhaps even futile, to try to find out to what extent Gorbachev was motivated by ideas, and to what extent the crisis of domestic reforms (to be discussed in the next section) pushed him to his new vision. At the same time, the project of a “common European home” did not progress far beyond mere rhetoric: just like Wilson in 1917 on the “League of Peace,” Gorbachev was vague on specifics. At a dinner with Jaruzelsky in July 1988, Gorbachev mused that it “would be important to move from this general idea to creating something that could be called a working draft; and then move step-by-step towards erecting the edifice of a new Europe.” In early February 1989, Chernyaev conveyed Gorbachev’s instructions to Vadim Zagladin:

Think about a speech for the European Parliament [to be delivered by Gorbachev]. Do not contact anyone or seek anyone’s advice; do not disclose what you are working on. We need to meet about the arguments [we want to make], as well as about the reasons we are in favor of a new Europe and what we mean by “a common European home.”

Specifically, Chernyaev instructed Zagladin to “implicitly support Mitterrand’s approach,” but at the same time make sure that Western Europeans “do not try to destabilize Eastern Europe.” One way suggested by the instructions was “to balance their approaches (based on a European consciousness) with the American approaches to Eastern Europe.”²⁹

²⁸ Speech by Mikhail Gorbachev at a dinner with Wojciech Jaruzelsky, July 11, 1988, in *Masterpieces*, 290–91.

²⁹ Memorandum from Chernyaev to Vadim Zagladin, February 4, 1989, in *Masterpieces*, 389.

This memorandum is revealing in several aspects. It shows that Gorbachev still believed (or so he said to Chernyaev) that the main sources of the destabilization of Eastern Europe would not come from within Eastern Europe, but from the West, specifically from the advocates of a “European consciousness” such as Mitterrand. Also, the initiative had a strikingly secretive, almost conspiratorial nature that cut off explicitly any expertise on Eastern Europe (Zagladin was a *Western* Europe expert, with long-standing connections in France, Germany, and Italy). Most importantly, this memorandum shows that Gorbachev’s “common European home” still had very little substance beyond the rhetoric. Chernyaev wrote about “a difficult task: not to repeat ourselves very much, but to produce something similar to the UN speech, only with a specifically European angle.” The amazing vagueness of the instructions was only underlined by Chernyaev’s final advice to his friend and colleague: “Work through it thoroughly, and prepare it on a good scholarly level.” Gorbachev planned to meet with Zagladin to discuss his speech.³⁰ We do not know if and when this happened, if at all.

Gorbachev, for all his idealism, seemed to want to balance the crafty European politicians with the Americans. If viewed strategically, his new vision could not be realized without America’s consent and cooperation. And the Soviet leader was (instinctively or consciously) correct to use such a sweeping quasi-Wilsonian rhetoric. Nothing less could have been appealing to an American public. The core of his rhetoric was “the peace to end all wars,” the complete renunciation of force in international affairs. This emphasis on non-violence also meshed well with Gorbachev’s personal penchant. Before December 1988, Soviet security and foreign policy was still—if only by mere institutional inertia—wedded to the revolutionary-imperial paradigm. This paradigm could be revived, and skeptics in Washington feared the worst. Now, Gorbachev proposed his own paradigm, based on sweeping ideas borrowed from the American ideological arsenal, as well as from Western European advocates of pacifism and dissident advocates of convergence between capitalism and communism. This was a radical ideological break with the past – as radical as one could conceive.

³⁰ Ibid.

Embracing these beliefs and principles, Gorbachev, of course, threw the most effective tools of Soviet power into the dustbin of history. Despite this, American comments on Gorbachev's turn varied from caution and skepticism to a complete denial. Many observers in American policy-making circles simply could not believe that the Kremlin would give up on Soviet geopolitical supremacy in Eastern Europe. But did Gorbachev expect to give it up? There is no evidence that, in late 1988 and early 1989, he ever contemplated "losing" or "abandoning" Eastern Europe. Moreover, it appears that Gorbachev, even if he thought only about how to avoid destabilization of Eastern Europe, did not dwell too much on this issue. He was absorbed by his new global project, and fancied himself a revolutionary world statesman, the architect of a geo-ideological alternative to the entire existing "old" practices of international relations. Fixated on integrating the Soviet Union with the West to save his reforms, Gorbachev no longer thought about Eastern Europe as a geostrategic glacis. Rather, he seemed to think about it as a possible *domestic*, not international political problem for him on the road towards the realization of his vision.

This hypothesis cannot be conclusively proven by the available evidence. But some evidence points in this direction. For instance, it was domestic resistance, especially from the military and the Soviet patriotic public, that Gorbachev had in mind, according to his closest advisers. Even in December 1988, when he announced substantial withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, he refused to plan a road map for subsequent withdrawals. In Chernyaev's relatively recent statement, Gorbachev's fear was the following: "Once we start to withdraw troops, the howling begins: 'What did we fight for, what did millions of our soldiers die for in World War II? Are we renouncing all that?' For Gorbachev at that time those issues were very sensitive."³¹

Returning to the earlier question about a strategy behind Gorbachev's vision: Did he calculate how to reach a "common European home"? Or did he simply want to muddle through, or use a Napoleonic *coup d'oeil* – political wits, intuition, quick reactions? If one searches for strategic foundations of Gorbachev's "common European home," two things come to the fore. First was Gorbachev's reliance on the achieve-

³¹ The author's archive, transcript of the Musgrove meeting, 1999, 79.

ments of Leonid Brezhnev's détente diplomacy during the 1970s: the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the Helsinki Final Act, and other developments of the all-European diplomatic framework were the only available foundations for the "Common European home." Western critics of the Final Act, signed by thirty-three European countries, the United States, and Canada, regarded it as an outgrowth from the "Yalta-Potsdam framework," legitimizing the Soviet Union's dominant role in European affairs. In retrospect, however, we can see that the CSCE and the Final Act was, in fact, the beginning of the "anti-Yalta" process in European diplomacy. At the Big Three summits, small European nations were regarded as objects, pieces of the puzzle-map to be divided and dominated. In contrast, the CSCE conferences provided a pan-European forum where small countries played a role no less prominent than France, Britain, and West Germany.³² The "anti-Yalta" character of the CSCE process continued to reveal itself in the follow-up meetings in Belgrade (1977–78) and Madrid (1980–83). Daniel C. Thomas, a prominent scholar on human rights and the Helsinki process, concludes, on the basis of critical oral history and memoir literature, that Mikhail Gorbachev had, from early on, a special approach to Europe. "Gorbachev's rethinking of the Soviet Union as a 'European' state began early in his rule," soon after he became the General Secretary in April 1985. Gorbachev, a law graduate from the Moscow State University, also "was apparently influenced by the strong support that Charter 77 and other East-bloc human rights movement received from Italian Communist party leader Enrico Berlinguer."³³ In my opinion, the evi-

³² Wilfried Loth, George Soutou, eds., *The Making of Détente. Eastern Europe and Western Europe in the Cold War, 1965–1975* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007); Marie-Pierre Rey, "The USSR and the Helsinki process, 1969–75: optimism, doubt, or defiance?" and Floribert Baudet, "It was Cold War and we wanted to win.' Human rights, détente, and CSCE," in Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny, and Christian Nuenlist, eds., *Origins of the European Security System. The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–1975* (New York: Routledge Press, 2008), 65–80; 183–95; Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente. How the West shaped the Helsinki CSCE* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2009).

³³ Daniel C. Thomas, "Human Rights Ideas, the Demise of Communism, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War History* vol. 7, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 118–19, 123–26.

dence supporting the latter statement is insufficient. Yet, it is easy to prove that Gorbachev decided to build on the OSCE foundation to achieve his striking new vision of convergence between East and West.

The second foundation of Gorbachev's vision was his own unique personal relations with the key Western leaders: Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl, and François Mitterand. These relations became his leverage to bring his vision to fruition. Indeed, only Western politicians—supported by an enthusiastic Western public—could agree to dismantle Cold War polarity and help to transform Soviet-style communism into an open version of “socialism with the human face” – through investments, assistance, and trade. This choice of leaning on the West was undeniable strategic. This new foundation for implementing Gorbachev's vision appeared in 1987–88 and began to produce tangible results. Even skeptical Henry Kissinger admitted later: “Until well into 1991, Gorbachev was considered in Washington to be an indispensable partner in the building of a new world order. ... Keeping Gorbachev in office turned into a principal objective of Western policymakers.”³⁴

Western support of Gorbachev was indeed an extraordinary development. Gorbachev's reliance on the good will of a few Western politicians, i.e. his assumption of good faith, honesty and integrity in international affairs may be praised by liberal internationalists. But as a strategic design, this reliance was an extraordinary risky affair. Gorbachev's partners could, after all, leave him in a lurch, or just leave the political scene. This had already happened in early 1989, when Reagan left the White House. Gorbachev saw, to his surprise and frustration, how hard it was to convince George Bush to become an international partner. To base one's political future not on the success of domestic reforms, but on the vision of a “common European home” was a huge gamble. Even Gorbachev's sympathetic biographer Andrei Grachev acknowledges this.³⁵ Eventually, not only Gorbachev's vision, but his power base became tethered to the good will and assistance of the West, above all the United States and Germany.

³⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 786.

³⁵ Andrei S. Grachev, *Final Days: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* with a foreword by Archie Brown, transl. by Margo Milne (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1995).

Gorbachev's gamble was based on many other contingencies—so many that it was hard to look at his policies as a strategy. Carl von Clausewitz in his famous *On War* writes about Napoleon's gamble in his Russian campaign of 1812: "If Bonaparte did not obtain a peace at Moscow, there was no alternative but to return—that is, there was nothing for him but a strategic defeat."³⁶ In Gorbachev's case, the biggest contingency turned out to be Eastern Europe. As Jacques Levesque has brilliantly demonstrated, the surprising fall of the Berlin Wall ruined Gorbachev's grand design. After that, there was nothing left for him but a strategic defeat. Of course, Gorbachev could not have predicted this; nor could anybody else in the world at that time. Still, the contingent and risky nature of Gorbachev's gamble – assuming peaceful and controlled transformations in Eastern Europe – remains a striking feature of his policy-making at this time.

Mark Kramer, in his well-documented publications, argues for "Moscow's active role" in encouraging peaceful political change in Eastern Europe. He finds consistency in Gorbachev's policies of promoting fundamental change and avoiding the use of force – even though he admits that the Soviet leader did so on the basis of erroneous assumptions that the socialist bloc would survive in a reformed shape.³⁷ Still, the available documentation makes us seriously doubt the thesis about "Moscow's active role." The Soviet leadership, more specifically, Gorbachev and his narrow circle of advisers and associates, did give their consent to the Polish "roundtable." It is important, however, to analyze closer how exactly this happened. Particularly revealing is Gorbachev's conversation with Josef Czyrek, a member of the Polish leadership who came to Moscow in September 1988 to discuss a possible political liberalization. Gorbachev, who began to prepare political liberalization in the Soviet Union, listened with interest to Polish plans to allow Solidarity to take part in half-free elections. At the same time, he did not seem to be very focused on Polish politics, and kept digressing into impressions about his recent trip to East Siberia. Finally, he asked: "Is your method of resolving the situation [admitting the Solidarity to political life] really commensurate

³⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Transl. by J.J. Graham) (London: Wordsworth, 1997), 125.

³⁷ Kramer "Gorbachev and the demise of east European communism," 186–87.

with the scale of events, or maybe you—please don't be offended—are starting to panic a little bit? Maybe you should try to resolve concrete problems without undertaking major steps effectively legitimizing the opposition?" Józef Czyrek told him that "events speeded up" the decision, primarily "because of the deterioration of the economic situation." The Soviet leader perfectly knew what his Polish partner meant. The USSR was no longer in position to provide vast economic and financial assistance to the Polish regime. The Polish preemptive plan was "to split the opposition, and to pull the more realistic segment into negotiations, to co-opt the banner of Solidarity along with Lech Wałęsa, to isolate the extremists."³⁸

This exchange looked more like a preparation for the NEP-kind retreat, rather than a decisive plunge into liberalization. Gorbachev clearly hoped to keep General Jaruzelski in power. He consented with the Polish proposal because it promised to avert Solidarity's new rise and possible victory. He said: "If [your actions] were characterized by a hasty forfeiting of positions, then we might have some doubts." The Polish political experiment of co-opting the opposition was "difficult, but necessary." Czyrek remarked: "Poland is your testing ground." He asked Gorbachev to exert some influence on the West Germans and Americans who "hold the key to our debt; they are our major creditors."³⁹

Gorbachev's personality was also hardly conducive to pro-active policy in Eastern Europe. My earlier writings identified the combination of overconfidence and procrastination, bold vision in thinking and ad-hocism in implementation, as the hallmarks of his personality and political style.⁴⁰ In the business of a "common European home" and Eastern European affairs, Gorbachev, like in many domestic undertakings, made amazing shifts from seemingly reactive gestures to gambling initiatives—in expectation of an eventual success. Even Gorbachev's loyalists define the Kremlin's attempts to address Eastern Europe as "improvised and somewhat chaotic gestures."⁴¹

³⁸ Svetlana Savranskaia et al., *Masterpieces*, 293–95.

³⁹ Ibid, 298–305.

⁴⁰ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 311–15.

⁴¹ See Gorbachev's memorandum to the Politburo on "Topical Questions regarding Collaboration with Socialist countries," in *Masterpieces of History*, 230–233; Grachev, *Final Days*, 117.

This improvised style revealed itself once again in January 1989, when Gorbachev met with the delegation of the Trilateral Commission. His conversations, in particular with Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Henry Kissinger, left the Soviet leader pensive; he began to think, perhaps for the first time, about the possible radical changes in Eastern Europe and the meaning for these changes for European integration and perestroika. At the Politburo session on January 24, he said:

Giscard ... believes that in 10-20 years all of us will deal with a federation of states called Europe. [Kissinger] was visibly upset by such statement and asked me point-blank: What would be your stand when Eastern Europe decides to join the [European Community]? It is not coincidental that they let me in on this. They know that our friends have been already knocking on those doors. And we should look at the processes [in Eastern Europe] now – economic, political – , which direction they are drifting.

It was at this moment that Gorbachev ordered the Politburo Commission on Eastern Europe to request from several groups of experts an “analysis of the situation.” He asked: “How should we act when [Hungary] decides to leave for EC?”⁴² Gorbachev tasked Yakovlev, the Foreign Ministry, and think tanks in Moscow to write scenarios about Eastern Europe. It is not, however, clear if he read them later; there are no records of Politburo discussions of them.

Gorbachev's style produced extraordinary gaps in policy-discussion and policy-making. The most striking case of this was Gorbachev's conversation with the Hungarian leader Miklos Nemeth in Moscow on March 3, 1989. Nemeth came to Moscow, as Czyrek had done months earlier, to discuss a political initiative with great significance for the entire bloc: the idea of dismantling the barbed wire on the Hungarian-Rumanian border. He clearly realized that this was an issue of stability for the other countries of the bloc as well, above all East Germany. Nemeth said: “Of course, we will have to talk to the

⁴² *V Politbiuro TsK*, 435–36; author's notes of the transcripts of this meeting from Chernyaev's papers, The Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation.

comrades from the GDR.” Gorbachev simply did not react to this. We do not have other documents on this crucial episode, as many documents, including the KGB reports, are missing. But it is equally probable to conclude that Gorbachev’s nodding was a bad oversight, not the result of a principled active stand. At that time, Gorbachev and his political adviser Georgy Shakhnazarov, who was “in charge” of Eastern Europe, were distracted by political developments at home.⁴³ These developments became so serious that they should be considered as another crucial part of the story of Gorbachev’s non-interference in Eastern European affairs.

Soviet Domestic “Revolution” in 1989 and Eastern Europe

By 1989, Gorbachev was a most popular man internationally, and in serious trouble at home. In the Far East, Soviet foreign policy was successfully reaching out to Deng Xiaoping’s China. In contrast, in the Soviet Union itself, perestroika was a drama of failed good intentions. The illusory and elitist project of renovating “socialism” did not rely on any real pragmatic concept and was especially timid and disastrous in the sphere of economy. For Gorbachev, the growing chorus of critics at home contrasted with the rise of “Gorbomania” in the West and the diplomatic breakthrough with China.

In 1985-87, Gorbachev and his reform-minded entourage set out by seeing détente as a means to liberate resources, consumed by the arms race and military preparedness, for domestic reforms. But already in 1988, they began to dream about a rapprochement with the West, especially the United States, but also various countries of Western Europe, as a means to save the crumbling perestroika. With Ronald Reagan in the Kremlin in May 1988, Gorbachev believed that the last obstacle to a partnership with the West was removed. The “golden era” of Gorbachev’s Western-focused foreign policy began, characterized by exalted expectations of a “Marshall Plan” for perestroika.

⁴³ Record of the conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Miklós Németh, March 3, 1989, in *Masterpieces*, 412–13.

Simultaneously, Gorbachev concluded that the main enemy of the successful reforms was the conservatism of the party apparatus. To overcome this, he needed new allies and political forces. But the Russian population, including the professional classes, had become accustomed to passivity and a wait-and-see attitude. The Soviet leader decided to unleash “new politics”—calibrated and supervised liberalization of the Soviet political domain. His later actions indicate that he wanted to create a new power base, with the Presidency relying on the “power of the Soviets”—in other words, to curb and then perhaps erode the power of the monopolist party-state apparatus. A pivotal moment in this regard was the People’s Congress scheduled for May 1989. The election of deputies to this congress for the first time allowed more than one (party) candidate, and led to resounding and humiliating electoral defeats of many party bigwigs. A month earlier, in April, the dismayed and defeated party *nomenklatura* loudly criticized Gorbachev at the Plenum of the CC CPSU for “letting them down.” Gorbachev’s decision was to order *Pravda* to publish the entire transcript of the Plenum—so that people could read where the party bosses stood and what they said. With the experiment of liberalization set in motion, the political map of Gorbachev and the “new thinkers” around him changed radically: the true allies and partners of perestroika were in the West; the enemies of Gorbachev’s course were within, in the party apparatus and beyond.⁴⁴

Gorbachev and his followers imagined a new “revolution from above” to lead to bitter political infighting. Russian conservative nationalism and traditional authoritarianism began to emerge as a great concern among the “new thinkers” early on in 1989, as they saw the collapsing popular support for Gorbachev’s “revolution.” Chernyaev, in his diary in November 1988, recorded these fears, widespread among the Soviet intellectuals, from liberal dissidents to “enlightened apparatchiks”: “Fanatism, hysteria has overwhelmed everything rational ... Another [military intervention like in] Czechoslovakia of 1968 is coming or ... [a civil war like in] Finland of 1918.” In other words, he expected either a mass use of military force in the Baltics, or a civil war in Russia. “Gorbachev must make a choice. Either scenario

⁴⁴ Brown, *Seven Years*, 114–28.

is very dangerous.” Chernyaev believed that the use of military force in the Baltics would mean the death of perestroika. He was surprisingly more sanguine about the second scenario. “Russian chauvinism plus conservatism in the second scenario could be, apparently, contained.”⁴⁵

Chernyaev became more and more pessimistic as the year went on. In May, he wrote in his diary about the imminent chaos and collapse of the Soviet economy, the Soviet bloc, the ideological sphere and the party: “Power is destabilized to the critical extent, and nothing new is visible to replace it.” And Gorbachev seemed to take it in stride. “His state of spirit—without panic, without nervousness. As if he is convinced deep inside that we would not drown.”⁴⁶ Other “new thinkers” expressed similar worries, and eventually began to share them with foreigners. Shevardnadze poured out his heart about the enemies of perestroika to the surprised James Baker in September 1989, at the ministerial talks in Jackson Hole, the United States. In October 1989, in conversation with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Yakovlev also came up with an alarmist estimate of the tattered relationship between the reformist elite and the masses. He said that the Gorbachev leadership “over-romanticized a possible behavior of workers” and failed to realize that the population “was accustomed to get unearned incomes.” For this reason, Gorbachev and his followers believed they could not carry out unpopular but necessary economic and financial measures, such as price reform – for fear to antagonize the majority of the population, especially workers and other low-income groups, already standing in endless food lines, increasingly angry and aggressive.⁴⁷

The relationship between the military and the “new thinkers” passed from coolness to undisguised hostility. After the spring of 1987, the Soviet General Staff began to blame the diplomatic and (though not publicly) political leadership of the Soviet Union for the “unwarranted concessions” to the Americans. In 1987–88, the rupture between the perestroika vanguard and the military was papered over. Gorbachev invited Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev to serve as his special military adviser to use the latter as an influential intermediary between

⁴⁵ Chernyaev, 773.

⁴⁶ Chernyaev, *Idem*, 706, 801.

⁴⁷ Chernyaev, 800; Yakovlev, *Op. cit.*, 380; see the same point in Brown, *Seven years*, 149–50.

the General Secretary and the increasingly apprehensive and recalcitrant military leadership. During 1988, Shevardnadze and even Gorbachev himself expressed their views on perestroika and foreign policy more frankly with Western visitors and interlocutors than with their own military commanders. The rift between the military leadership and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze grew into mutual hatred. At the end of 1988, Shevardnadze reported to Gorbachev that the military cheated him by developing new types of weaponry and stationing powerful forces near the WTO-NATO divide, and by undertaking provocative intelligence operations. Gorbachev did not protect Shevardnadze, yet he was clearly on his side in the growing rift.⁴⁸

In April 1989, the Soviet troops stationed in South Caucasus became involved in the anti-demonstration action in Tbilisi, with dozens of victims among civilians. At the Politburo, Gorbachev said: "The leadership of Georgia was caught by events. They used the forces of the Defense Ministry by themselves, without informing the Center."⁴⁹ Gorbachev confirmed his commitment to exclude any use of military force inside and outside the Soviet Union. Gorbachev and the "new thinkers"—just like numerous Russian socialists in the Russian revolution of 1917—suspected that the army might become a tool of conservative reaction, perhaps even ignite a civil war. As a result, they systematically undercut the prestige and credibility of the military, and did not even attempt to protect the top military leaders from vehement political criticism after the "Tbilisi episode" and later. The attitude of Gorbachev and other "new thinkers" to the military was reciprocated by irritation, and then animosity, among the top military.

The perception among the "new thinkers" that the military leadership wanted to undermine the new military doctrine and perestroika continued to grow throughout 1989, and contributed to a startling gap

⁴⁸ The best Western account of the rift between Gorbachev's camp and the Soviet military is William Odom, *Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); the milder version is Sergei Akhromeyev and Georgi Kornienko, *Glazami Marshala i Diplomata. Kriticheskii Vzgljad na Vneshniiu Politiku SSSR do i posle 1985 god.* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniie Otnosheniia, 1992); Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi Iskhod*, 772.

⁴⁹ Vorotnikov, *A bylo eto tak*, 289.

between the radical pronouncements and the stasis in Soviet military deployments in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately the crucial documents of the Defense Council or the General Staff, which could shed light on the deliberations of 1988–89, are still closed. One day these documents will hopefully provide a clear answer as to how the Soviet military leadership reacted to the rapidly changing situation.

This “revolutionary” political mapping of Gorbachev and other believers in his perestroika proved to be an important, if not decisive, factor in the expectations, fears, and preferences of Gorbachev and the “new thinkers” with regards to possible scenarios in Eastern Europe. By the end of 1988, it was obvious that perestroika had enemies not only inside the Soviet Union, but in Eastern Europe as well. Janos Kadar, on the basis of his Hungarian experience, concluded as early as 1987 that Gorbachev, through his domestic policies, would bring a catastrophe upon the USSR.⁵⁰ Honecker in East Germany, Nicolae Ceaușescu in Rumania, and Todor Zivkov in Bulgaria rejected, in fact quite justifiably so, any applicability of perestroika’s lessons for their countries. They increasingly criticized Gorbachev and the “new thinkers” for ideological and political “concessions” to capitalism. Gorbachev and the reformers’ elite began to regard these people as political enemies, putting them on the other side of the imagined revolutionary barricades, together with the potentially counterrevolutionary Soviet military, unreconstructed party apparatchiks, neo-Stalinists, and ultra-nationalists.

The worst-case scenario for the “new thinkers” was “the Hungarian scenario,” a violent explosion of mass anger just like in October 1956. In late 1988 and early 1989, the memoranda of the “new thinkers” dealing with Eastern Europe (Georgy Shakhnazarov and others) were imbued with these concerns. Most experts concluded that Soviet allies were already quietly rejecting “socialism” and were “in a powerful magnetic field” of the West. The most frank analysis, written by the Institute of Economics of World Socialist System (IEMSS) headed by Oleg Bogomolov, pointed to the main danger for the “new thinkers”: if the ruling parties had not made concessions to the opposition forces, there would be “a political eruption.” It prophesied that any kind of political-military intervention did not guarantee a success,

⁵⁰ Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, 66.

but instead might trigger a chain-reaction of violence and lead to self-destruction of the Soviet bloc. All papers warned against any form of Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe.⁵¹ They confirmed the viewpoint that Georgy Shakhnazarov, the supervisor of Eastern European affairs in Gorbachev's entourage, had expressed in his memo to the General Secretary in October 1988: "We should clearly see that in the future any possibility to "put out" crisis situations [in Eastern Europe] by military means must be fully excluded. Even the old leadership seems to have already realized it, at least with regard to Poland."⁵²

In the first months of 1989, Gorbachev and his advisers completely shifted their attention from foreign policy (with the exception of relations with a few key Western countries) to the domestic experiment of controlled political liberalization. Shakhnazarov himself spent the lion's share of his time not on Eastern Europe, but on preparations for the first Congress of People's Deputies that opened on May 25. There was a never-ending business of drafting speeches and new legislation.⁵³ The changes in the Eastern European countries became overshadowed by the arc of crises inside the Soviet Union and the major political show in Moscow. "The attention of all of the leadership switched to the internal problems," summarized Shakhnazarov about what happened, "and so Eastern Europe was put on the back burner."⁵⁴ When confronted with the rapid changes in Eastern Europe, the Kremlin intervened only when there was a danger of mass uprising or violence in Eastern Europe, as these developments were seen as serious factors

⁵¹ A memo of the International Department of the Central Committee, "On the Strategy of Relations with European Socialist Countries," February 1989, and a memo from the Institute of World Socialist System (Bogomolov), February 1989. Jacques Levesque obtained both documents from private possession and donated them to the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C. They were translated for the Musgrove conference. For the analysis of the Soviet discussion of the future of Central Europe see Levesques, *The Enigma of 1989*, 68–90.

⁵² Shakhnazarov, *Tsena Svobodi*, 369.

⁵³ Shakhnazarov's explanation in the Musgrove transcript (the author's archive), 87; see also the changing ratio of documents on foreign and domestic problems in Shakhnazarov's memoirs, *Tsena Svobodi*, 384–407.

⁵⁴ Shakhnazarov at the conference in Musgrove, Georgia, 1999, transcript (the author's archive).

that might encourage a domestic backlash in Moscow and therefore endanger the revolutionary course of Gorbachev's perestroika.

This was a typical picture for the rest of 1989. On October 11, Chernyaev commented in his diary after writing about the Azeri-Armenian conflict: "The civil war in the country has already begun."⁵⁵ Gorbachev's desperate and inept attempts to prevent this civil war preoccupied him through October-December. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9 caught him and other Kremlin leaders completely by surprise. The Soviet Ambassador to the GDR, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, tried in vain to reach Gorbachev and Shevardnadze on a secure phone. As a counselor of the Embassy recalls: "The entire leadership was busy and nobody could find time for the GDR."⁵⁶ The available fragmentary minutes and recollections show that during a briefing with select colleagues in the "Walnut room" on the eve of the Politburo session on November 9, Gorbachev shared his concerns about the political situation in Bulgaria, but he was much more concerned by the separatist trends in Lithuania. The agenda of the Politburo included discussion on the time and agenda of the second Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR and possible changes in the Constitution. Another big issue was a possible transfer of Byelorussia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia to a regime of economic liberalization. Gorbachev suggested "to buy" the Balts by offering more economic incentives. Prime Minister Ryzhkov exploded: "What should we do? If we introduce a common free market between insulated republics, chaos would emerge. We should fear not the Baltic republics, but Russia and Ukraine. A common collapse is approaching. In which case there will be another government, in another country." Vorotnikov concurred: "If all that we say to the Balts becomes publicly known, there would be an explosion in Russia."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 809.

⁵⁶ The most comprehensive account can be found in Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Chronik des Mauerfalls. Die dramatischen Ereignisse um den 9. November 1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1996), 233–37; see also Igor Maksimych, "Berlinskaia stena. Eio padeniie glazami ochevidtsa," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, November 10, 1993; Kochemasov, *Meine letzte Mission*, 185; Ivan Kuzmin, *Kruscheniie GDR*, 60.

⁵⁷ *V Politbiuro TsK*, 529; Vorotnikov, *A bylo eto tak*, 311–18; *Soyuz možno bilo*, 75–77.

The Soviet leadership was even more surprised by the revolution in Rumania. In the days leading up to this event, Gorbachev, all his advisers, and the rest of the Party and state leadership devoted their full time and energy to debates on how to prevent a complete political collapse in the Soviet Union. Growing segments of intellectuals, students, and other supporters of radical changes switched their support to Boris Yeltsin. When Gorbachev warned rhetorically at a party plenum that he could retire, all the military in the audience shouted in chorus: "Long overdue!"⁵⁸ At the second Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow the coalition of the Baltic, Georgia, and other delegates demanded national independence. The group of radical deputies, including Andrei Sakharov, sympathized with nationalist separatists, and wanted "to support" Gorbachev's perestroika through a two-day national strike. When Gorbachev's envoys pointed that it might lead to more destabilization and even violence, Sakharov and his colleagues responded that perestroika was in "a terrible deadlock," the chauvinist forces of Russian nationalism were gaining in strength, and only the "mobilization of people" could check them.⁵⁹ Against this backdrop, the revolution in Rumania was just a diversion from more serious concerns. Ceaușescu was in Moscow in early December for the last meeting of the Warsaw Pact leaders. Yet Gorbachev and the rest of Soviet politicians had no clue about events in Bucharest when they erupted on December 21. For Gorbachev, the real and pressing crisis during these days was the decision of the Lithuanian communists, under the popular nationalist pressure, to declare full independence for Lithuania.⁶⁰

Gorbachev's and Eastern European Revolutions: a Reappraisal

Timothy Garton Ash has recently argued that "In the nine months that gave birth to a new world, from February to November 1989, the United States and the Soviet Union were largely passive midwives.

⁵⁸ Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 829.

⁵⁹ Andrei Sakharov Archive, the Houghton Library, Harvard, Box 51, Folder S.II. 2.6.1.45.

⁶⁰ Vorotnikov, *A bylo eto tak*, 361–79.

They made history by what they did not do. And both giants stood back partly because they underestimated the significance of things being done by little people in little countries.”⁶¹ This paper supports this conclusion as far as Gorbachev is concerned. I would, however, add a caveat.

As a politician, Gorbachev muddled through and had no consistent pro-active policy in Eastern European affairs. His overall vision for Eastern Europe was based on wrong assumptions and completely back-fired. In contrast, the Gorbachev factor in the developments of 1989 in Eastern Europe was huge. Scholars and commentators in Eastern Europe today who continue to ignore this factor simply distort history. The first aspect of this Gorbachev factor was his immense institutional power, which mattered whether it was used or not. As General Secretary of the CPSU, Gorbachev monopolized vital decision-making to an extent impossible in any other political system. He was the last person who inherited the immense power functions accumulated by Stalin. As Gorbachev presided over the collapse of the communist empire, the USSR still had hundreds of thousands of armed forces in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. To the last moment, it was not taken for granted by anybody (at least not widely known) that those forces would remain neutral, and that Soviet non-interference would not end abruptly. The fact that Gorbachev never even wanted to contemplate the use of force was of tremendous significance, reassuring the peaceful change in Eastern Europe.

The second aspect of the Gorbachev factor was his immense “soft power” in Eastern and Western Europe, as millions of people began to look at him with hope for change. Any of Gorbachev’s appearances in Eastern European countries became a factor of immense symbolism and importance, comparable to the visits of Pope John Paul II to Poland in 1979 and more important than the visits of the U.S. President George Bush to Hungary and Poland in the summer of 1989. All hopes for peaceful transformations, both in the West and in Eastern European countries themselves, focused on one personality in the Kremlin – Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev.

⁶¹ Ash, “1989!” *New York Review of Books* vol. 56, no. 17 (November 5, 2009): 4–8.

At every crucial stage of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, and then the collapse of communist regimes, Gorbachev remained, whether he acted or not, the beacon of this historic change. He made people believe that he would be with them when they overthrow the communist regimes. Gorbachev's rambling speech in East Berlin in October 1989 during which he said that "history punishes those who are late" was perceived by many in the West and by Eastern Europeans themselves as a nod of consent. This was the imagined reality that proved to be more important than the "reality" of Gorbachev's intentions. Gorbachev fully deserves a distinguished place in any hall of fame that would be constructed for the events of 1989, the greatest peaceful revolution that Europe has ever seen. There should also be, however, room for a revisionist exploration of his policies and personality.

JEFFREY HERF

*Success Was Not an Orphan:
The Battle of the Euromissiles in 1983
and the Events of 1989 to 1991*

Following the failure of the American invasion of Cuba in 1962, President Kennedy referred to the old saying that success has a hundred fathers, but failure is an orphan. Perhaps if Kennedy had been alive to see reflections on the causes of the revolutions of 1989, it might have occurred to him to say that in this case, it was success which has been an orphan, because one of the key causal factors that made 1989 possible receives so little mention. I am speaking of the Western victory in the battle of the euromissiles. The public record and available scholarship suggest that this victory was one of the necessary preconditions for the Soviet collapse of 1989–91 and the revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989. Indeed, the course of events from 1983 to 1989 in Europe offers much evidence that the successful implementation of the NATO two-track decision of December 1979 in the fall of 1983 was one of the major turning points of postwar European as well as global history.

In my 1991 book *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance and the Battle of the Euromissiles*, I presented the following case: The deployment of intermediate range nuclear missiles known as the SS-20s by the Soviet Union was understood by the Soviet military and political leadership as an political instrument in a long standing Cold War with the United States. Their purpose was to erode the credibility of NATO's policy of extended nuclear deterrence and weaken American presence and influence in Western Europe. The means of achieving this goal was the fear of nuclear war stoked by a "peace offensive" in Western Europe, which sought to use peace movements in the streets and parties of the democratic left to paralyze NATO's decision making capacity. The Soviet argument

during what came to be called “the second Cold War” was that it was the United States and its weapons which was the primary threat to peace, and thus only by breaking with American policy could Europe be spared the catastrophe of nuclear war.¹ The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was the epicenter of this battle over the euromissiles, though in England, Belgium, Holland and Italy large street demonstrations took place in 1981 to 1983 against NATO and American policy. In West Germany, northern Europe and England, the parties of the democratic left turned against the NATO deployments and placed primary blame for the failure of negotiations on the United States and NATO, and then voted against support for deployments in the fall of 1983. Although the SPD had become a lever for, rather than a bulwark against, Soviet negotiating proposals, its turn away from the double-decision first led to the end of its role in a governing coalition in West Germany in 1982. It did not become a governing power again until 1998, well after the end of the Cold War. In 1983, Soviet efforts to use the pluralism and freedoms of Western societies to undermine Western policy failed. The combination of Western firmness with policies of Détente that led to the defeat of Soviet policy in 1983 facilitated the era of new thinking and reform in the Gorbachev era.

We must await the opening of the key archives of Soviet military and political decision making in order to arrive at an adequate account of these matters. As we will see, some prominent accounts have given strangely little attention to what was one of the most intense, if not the most intense, political battle of the entire Cold War waged in Western Europe. Following German unification, the archives of the Socialist Unity (that is, Communist) Party of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), including key files of its International Division and Foreign Ministry, were declassified. In *Wie die Sowjetunion den Kalten Krieg Verlor: Von der Nachrüstung zum Mauerfall* (How the Soviet Union Lost the Cold War: From the NATO INF Decision of 1979 and Deployments of 1983 to the Fall of the Wall), his study published in 2000 based on

¹ Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

access to those files, the German historian Michael Ploetz examined East German and Soviet interpretations of those events.² Ploetz's reading of public and previously classified statements by Soviet officials documents their awareness that their policy of confrontation and expanded armament had failed both to change the policies of the governments of the Western Alliance, and to convince a majority of Western voters that the major danger to peace came from Washington rather than Moscow. For the younger generation that assumed power in the 1980s, the deployment of the SS-20 during the Breshnev era became the symbol of a "foreign policy disaster" that rested on an ideologically driven bundle of misunderstandings of Western societies and international politics.³

The revolutions of 1989 and the collapse of Communism and the Soviet empire between 1989 and 1991 was the first time, at least since the formal creation of the European state system in Westphalia in 1648, that an entire empire collapsed and disappeared without having been destroyed by military force in open warfare. The empires of Napoleon and Hitler succumbed only as a consequence of their enemies' determination to destroy them. The Habsburg Empire expired as a byproduct of defeat in World War I. Britain's global empire was a casualty of the weaker position from which it emerged after World War II. French colonialism expired in the more conventional form of military defeats in Vietnam and Algeria; the British, French, as well as the remaining Belgian, Dutch and Portuguese empires expired under the impact of the spread of nationalism, including in some cases armed anti-colonialism, to their former colonies. The colonial empires "collapsed," but these shaky edifices were also pushed over. Yet there has been a certain reluctance to acknowledge that Western policy played a crucial role in the peaceful collapse of Communism and the Soviet Union. By Western policy I mean both that of the United States and equally that of the NATO countries of Western Europe. West Europeans were active subjects who fought

² Michael Ploetz, *Wie die Sowjetunion den Kalten Krieg Verlor: Von der Nachrüstung zum Mauerfall* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2000). Also see his *Ferngelenkte Friedensbewegung?: DDR und UdSSR im Kampf gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluss* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004).

³ Idem., 345.

a vigorous political battle, not only or even primarily bystanders to a superpower rivalry over which they had no influence.

It is understandable that a great deal of attention has been focused on actual hot wars that took place between Communists and their adversaries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Yet these conflicts took place on the “periphery” of the Cold War, in both a geographical and a power political sense. Victory and defeat in these conflicts were matters of life and death for thousands of people, but they could not determine the outcome of the Cold War in Europe; nor could these outcomes exert a decisive impact on the global contest between the Soviet Union and the Western Alliance. Indeed, the Soviet collapse took place only fourteen years after the United States was defeated in Vietnam. By contrast, victory or defeat in the political battle over the future of Europe would have had a decisive impact on the whole global contest. An American defeat in this most important (along with Japan) theater of the Cold War would have had greater ramifications than did the loss of the war in Vietnam.

The battle of the Euromissiles and the large anti-deployment demonstrations by the self-described peace movement was intense in Belgium, England, Holland Italy, and West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany). Yet it was in the Federal Republic that the political battle was most intense and most crucial with regards to its outcome. West Germany was a non-nuclear power whose political leaders first raised the issue of the expanded Soviet threat to Western Europe. It was there that Pershing ballistic missiles would be deployed in addition to the Cruise missiles that would be deployed in other NATO member states. Not surprisingly, especially in light of Nazi Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union and the race war on the Eastern Front in World War II, the euromissile debate in the Federal Republic was especially heated. Indeed, Soviet propagandists accused the Western Alliance of planning a “nuclear Auschwitz.” Yet despite some of the largest demonstrations in postwar West European and West German history, the West European governments, including West Germany’s, made a shambles of the Kremlin’s strategy to use the fear of nuclear war to weaken American influence in Europe and perhaps even destroy the Western Alliance.

The Battle of the Euromissiles Recalled

The battle of the euromissiles revolved around the question of whether the Soviet Union would be able to erode the will of the NATO alliance by taking advantage of internal differences within Western societies, and by exploiting potential conflicts of interests between member states of the Atlantic Alliance, especially between non-nuclear West Germany and the nuclear powers, Britain and France. The key to this effort was the perfectly understandable fear of nuclear war, which, the Soviet government claimed, would be made more likely if NATO was able to proceed with the planned deployments. This was so, it asserted, because their purpose was to fight and win a nuclear war limited to the Soviet Union and Europe. Such arguments were ironic because it was West European, especially West German, political leaders and strategists of the center left who, in the mid-1970s, first raised concerns about the Soviet intermediate range nuclear missile build-up. Western strategists argued that what came to be called the SS-20s gave Moscow the ability to credibly threaten a nuclear war limited to Western Europe, and thus to erode the credibility of the American policy of extended nuclear deterrence. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in particular insisted that the principle of a balance of forces apply to Soviet relations with Western Europe, and not only with the United States, and that the Soviet Union dismantle the SS-20s and refrain from deploying any more. West German strategists, such as Uwe Nerlich, worried that Soviet strategy entailed using the “lever” of a détente-minded Social Democratic Party, as well as the then new Green Party, to erode Western negotiating positions in arms control talks.⁴ This moment of opportunity was created by the evolution of West German and northern West European Social Democratic parties, from the anti-Soviet bulwarks they had been in the first decades of the Cold War, into levers which the Soviet Union could pull to advance its positions

⁴ Uwe Nerlich and Falks Bomsdorf, eds. *Sowjetische March und westliche Verhandlungspolitik in Wandel militärischer Kraftverhältnisse* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1982); and “Theatre Nuclear Forces In Europe: Is NATO Running Out of Options?” *Washington Quarterly* vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 100–25.

in negotiations with the United States and NATO. Social Democracy did not become pro-Soviet, but the argument that a Western hardline would endanger West Germany's peace and détente policy led them to exert pressure more on Western than on Soviet negotiating proposals. This shift was reinforced and deepened by a long march through the institutions of the 1960s left in positions of influence in the media, universities and politics.

The French journalist Jean François Revel in his 1984 book, *How Democracies Perish*, worried that the structural differences between dictatorship and democracy meant that the latter could “perish” due to the ability of dictators to influence open debate in the West while immunizing themselves from domestic criticism. In what I called “asymmetric strategic interaction,” the fear of nuclear war could become a strategic disadvantage because it was only in democracies that such fear could change government policy.⁵ French President François Mitterand offered a succinct version of such asymmetry when he quipped that the Soviets deployed missiles and the Western Alliance deployed pacifists. In the battle of the euromissiles, Soviet strategy entailed fanning fears of nuclear war, continuing the SS-20 build-up, stoking fears of an imminent nuclear war, and hoping that the parties of the left and center left, related movements in the streets, and supporters in the print and electronic media would lead NATO to cancel its deployments while leaving the SS-20s in place. In West Germany and the other deployment countries, the anti-deployment or peace movements coined and in some cases incorporated terms such as “nuclear Holocaust” and “Europe’s Auschwitz,” and fulfilled Soviet hopes that their peace activism would focus on stopping NATO’s plans. The strategy failed because the Soviet leaders overplayed their hand. From 1976 to 1983, as they steadily increased the number of SS-20s aimed at Western Europe, they made a farce of Premier Leonid Brezhnev’s and then Yuri Andropov’s claims that a balance of intermediate range nuclear forces continued to exist. The gap between assertion and reality became obvious to a majority of voters in the United States, Britain and West Germany. Many factors determined national elections in those years, but a backlash against Soviet pressure helped

⁵ Herf, *War by Other Means*, 7–12.

to bring leaders into power in the West who were determined to implement the NATO two-track decision of December 1979.

The Soviet peace offensive of 1979 to 1981 put chronology and logic on their head and claimed that NATO had taken the two-track decision in order to fight and win a limited nuclear war in Europe. In November 1981, the Reagan administration offered the Soviets a “zero-zero” option in the Geneva “INF” (Intermediate Range Nuclear Force) arms control negotiations. The “zero-zero” option called for the United States to abandon the deployment of any new intermediate range nuclear missiles (Pershing II ballistic and Cruise supersonic missiles) in Western Europe if the Soviet Union would dismantle its intermediate range arsenal. Clearly if the United States was willing to forgo any new deployments, the NATO decision could not have been intended to be a sinister American effort to fight and win a nuclear war limited to Europe. On the contrary, by increasing the likelihood that a Soviet attack on Western Europe would lead to an American counter-offensive directly striking the Soviet Union, its purpose was to enhance extended deterrence and convince the Soviet leaders – whom Western leaders regarded as rational actors—that, as they would be unable to limit a war to Western Europe and would instead be faced with nuclear retaliation from the United States, it would be best not to start a war. That is, its purpose was to sustain the already existing Western strategy of extended nuclear deterrence coupling the United States to the defense of Western Europe; exactly the reverse of what the Soviet Union and the West European peace movements claimed was the case.

Soviet diplomats, the West European movements protesting the NATO decision, and the liberal and left-liberal press and political groups in the United States dismissed the “zero-zero” option of November 1981 as a cynical negotiating strategy, one so preposterous that no Soviet leader could possibly accept it. Hence, so their arguments ran, it was a merely a negotiators ploy to make Western deployments more likely. Yet the broader electorate was not convinced that this was the case. Soviet diplomats and the peace movements in Western Europe found it more difficult to claim that the purpose of the NATO deployments was to fight and win a nuclear war limited to Europe when President Reagan asserted that he would be willing to forgo the deployments altogether if the Soviets would give up mis-

siles they did not need for defense and had only recently deployed. This “freeze” campaign had some success in the West European and American left, yet it soon became evident that its adoption would put in place a large numerical imbalance in favor of the Soviet Union at the intermediate range level. Western anti-deployment activists and politicians, the majority of which were not supporters of the Soviet Union, found themselves in the embarrassing position of “objectively” tolerating a vast Soviet military build-up directed at their own countries, while at the same time claiming to be opposed to “the arms race” driven by two, in their view, equally dangerous superpowers.

To Moscow’s surprise and consternation, politicians who supported the NATO decision, who drew attention to the political purposes of the Soviet military build-up, stressed the need to remain firm allies of the United States, and rejected a policy of neutralism and a third path between “both superpowers,” won crucial elections between 1980 and 1983. The most important of these elections took place in West Germany on March 6, 1983, when the Christian Democratic-Free Democratic (CDU-FDP) coalition led by Helmut Kohl and Hans-Dietrich Genscher defeated the Social Democratic Party (SPD). By then, the SPD had turned away from support for the NATO decision and the Western negotiating position in Geneva. The CDU-FDP victory reinforced the democratic legitimacy of a coalition that had emerged the previous fall as the West German liberals (FDP) broke from their coalition with the left-moving Social Democrats. Differences over the NATO decision played a key role in Genscher’s decision to end his coalition with Helmut Schmidt and an SPD that was moving away from the Chancellor’s own foreign policy views.

The Soviet wager that fear inspired by the Soviet build-up would erode popular support for the NATO deployments backfired. Brezhnev and Andropov dismissed NATO’s concerns about the SS-20 when they were first expressed in a NATO communiqué of 1976. They dismissed West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt’s warnings, expressed in person in Moscow, that he opposed the SS-20 build-up and would adopt a policy to restore a balance of nuclear forces at the intermediate range level if the Soviets did not reduce or dismantle them. The SS-20s, when placed in various locations across the Soviet Union, were able to reach all of Asia and the Middle East, in addition to Western Europe. The result of the continuing SS-20 build-up

was a global counter-coalition that ultimately included Japan as well. Despite tens of thousands of demonstrators in the streets and support from the parties of the left—except for France—the Soviet leaders had overplayed their hand. Though they won the battle for the opinion of significant parts of the Western left-leaning intellectual and political elites, they lost the battle for broader public opinion in Western Europe, and the United States.⁶ In the fall of 1983, NATO proceeded with deployments of Pershing and Cruise Missiles. Following several years of very cold relations, the new Soviet leader, Mikhael Gorbachev, expressed interest in previously rejected Western proposals. In fact, in 1987, to the chagrin of those who had derided it as a cynical negotiating ploy, he accepted the much-debated “zero-zero” option first proposed by Reagan six years earlier. Those principles served as the basis for the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces or INF Treaty of 1987, which eliminated the entire class of intermediate range nuclear missiles in the Soviet Union and Western Europe, including all of the SS-20s, the preceding SS-4 and SS-5, as well as the Pershing and land-based Cruise missiles in Western Europe.

In other words, the NATO deployments of 1983 amounted to a decisive defeat for the Soviet hardline. Based on what Soviet leaders have said publicly and the timing of Gorbachev’s ascendancy, it is a plausible hypothesis that this defeat aided those in the Soviet establishment, such as Gorbachev, who argued that a change in foreign policy was essential. Had the Soviet military build-up and the associated peace offensive succeeding in preventing the deployments, the hardliners in Moscow – Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, Andrei Gromyko – could have claimed that the SS-20 arsenal had led to the most decisive political defeat and strategic setback of American and NATO policy in the history of the Cold War in Europe. However, when their wager on the military option failed, they also lost an argument in Moscow about how best to deal with the West. Further, had the NATO decision collapsed as a result of domestic protest in the West, it is conceivable that Gorbachev and the reformers might not have come to power and that the Soviet Union and the Communist countries might have survived at the same time as trans-Atlantic bonds would have had an uncer-

⁶ Herf, *War by Other Means*, 113–216.

tain future. It is thus a plausible hypothesis that the Western victory and Soviet defeat in the fall of 1983 was a necessary precondition for Gorbachev's rise to power, and thus for the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika. Gorbachev and his associates could plausibly claim that the old thinking had failed and that new thinking and reform was essential. Without Glasnost and Perestroika, without a leadership unwilling to use armed force to crush dissent at crucial moments, the revolutions of 1989 could not have taken place. It is in this sense that the Soviet defeat in 1983 was one of a number of necessary but not sufficient causes for the success of the revolutions of 1989. An adequate assessment of the historical connection between the defeat of 1983 and the rise of the reformers requires access to the relevant archives of the former Soviet Union.

However, in the midst of the events of 1989, West German Chancellor Kohl expressed his views on the subject. The record of a telephone conversation between Kohl and President George Bush on December 3, 1989, included the Chancellor's reflections on the historical causes of the remarkable events of that fall.

The events of 1989 were taking place because he [Kohl] he did not give in to Soviet threats and instead proceeded with the deployments of the Pershing II. When NATO proved itself to be stabile, Gorbachev saw that he would lose the arms race and that his economic situation would become even worse. He began Perestroika. The results in Hungary, Poland and the German Democratic Republic were to be expected. Only the speed with which they have emerged is surprising.⁷

⁷ Helmut Kohl, "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Präsident Bush, Laeken bei Brüssel, 3. Dezember 1989," in Hans Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*: 602–3. The German text reads: "Dies sei einmal, weil er [Kohl] 1982/83 vor der Drohung nicht zurückgewichen sei und die Stationierung der Pershing II durchgesetzt habe. Als die NATO als stabil erwiesen habe, habe Gorbachev eingesehen, daß er den Rüstungswettlauf verliere und seine wirtschaftliche Lage immer schlechter werde. Er habe mit der 'Perestroika' begonnen. Die Folgen in Ungarn, Polen und in der DDR seien zu erwarten gewesen; nur die Geschwindigkeit, mit der sie eingetreten seien, wäre überraschend."

Here, Kohl asserted that the outcome of the battle of the euromissiles was the decisive turning point of the last decade of the Cold War. The failure to fracture the Western Alliance in the early 1980s was, in his view, a necessary precondition for the emergence of Gorbachev and the unforeseen but not surprising consequences of the process of reform he initiated. (In this sense, the revolutions of 1989 do bear comparison to the French Revolution, for there as well initiatives from above in support of long overdue reforms led to consequences that destroyed, rather than reformed, the monarchy.)

The NATO hardline is understandably connected with conservative politicians on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet it is important to recall that the turning point of 1983 was not originally due to their efforts. The NATO two-track decision had its origins in the decisions of a West German Social Democrat (Schmidt), a British Labor Party Prime Minister, James Callaghan, a Democratic President Jimmy Carter, and a moderate Conservative in France, Giscard d'Estaing. It began with West European initiatives and was completed with the support of democratically elected governments in Britain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Federal Republic of Germany. These West European origins of the decision and the West European elements of its implementation are too often forgotten in histories that focus primarily on the United States and the Soviet Union, or on the antagonism towards Reagan by the left and left-liberal media and political groups in Western Europe. On more than one occasion, West European leftists and left-liberals found themselves astonished and angered to hear French Socialists in the Mitterand mold warn of West German neutralism, or to read Polish and Czech dissidents who expressed concern that the Western peace movements were insufficiently critical of Soviet negotiating positions or willing to support Soviet "freeze" proposals. In the battle of the euromissiles, the claim of the Western left to speak for Europe or for Europe's intellectuals was also fractured, as the Poles and Czechs in particular argued that peace in Europe required human rights, an end to dictatorship, and a return to political freedom; that is, a regime change in their countries.

During the battle of the euromissiles, the Social Democratic Party in West Germany and the peace movement rested, in part, on a rejection of what they pejoratively referred to as the ideology of Cold War anti-communism. It was this ideology, not Soviet policy, that they

considered a threat to peace in Europe. The dismantling of this edifice began with political elites, such as Willy Brandt himself, as well as Egon Bahr and Social Democratic advocates of *Neue Ostpolitik*. Over time, the momentum of Détente in West Germany led to a rejection of sharp criticism of the Soviet Union, either for its denial of human rights or for its military build-up, because such criticisms were said in themselves to be threats to Détente and thus to peace. While insisting on their continued support for the Western Alliance, the West German Social Democrats, and even more so the Greens and the peace movements, avoided drawing distinctions between democracies and dictatorships, free societies and dictatorships. Instead, the SPD spoke of a “European peace order” (*europäische Friedensordnung*), “common security” (*gemeinsame Sicherheit*), “security partnership” (*Sicherheitspartnerschaft*), and of “both superpowers.” In place of the distinction between democracy and dictatorship, its leaders focused on the difference between nuclear and non-nuclear powers. They thereby found common ground with Soviet attempts to bring discussion of British and French nuclear weapons into the Geneva intermediate range negotiations. The British and French absolutely refused to countenance anything of the sort. Yet while the Western peace movements focused their criticism on American and NATO, the dissidents in Eastern Europe were moving away from the “socialism with a human face” of 1968 and towards a wholehearted embrace of variations of the themes of political and economic liberalism. During these years, these differences between the dissidents in Eastern Europe on the one hand, and the West European left on the other, became pronounced.

1989 was yet another step in the Westernization, or rather re-Westernization, of Europe. That is, the theory and practice of liberal democracy and market economics were strongest in Britain, Western Europe, and the United States. Historians of West Germany have pointed out that one of the key developments of its forty-year history was the Westernization of its political and intellectual life, or rather, the reinforcement of those “Western” elements that had been defeated in the Nazi era but were revived thereafter. This Westernization was evident during the battle of the euromissiles. It was the distinctive contribution of Helmut Kohl, Hans-Dietrich Genscher and other figures of the center right, such as Manfred Wörner and Alois Mertes, to have

made the case for the missile deployments. In the context of modern German history, this western orientation of West German conservatives was a novelty introduced after World War II by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. It displaced the anti-western resentments that had been a defining feature of German conservatism from 1870 to 1945. To be sure, support for the Western Alliance and a broader westernization of West German society and politics extended across the political system to the center left. Indeed, as Social Democracy's first postwar leader Kurt Schumacher repeatedly noted, Social Democracy needed no lessons about Western political traditions, as it was the party which had always defended democracy against dictatorship.⁸ Yet the historic irony of the winter to the fall of 1983, i.e. from the "missile election" in March to the deployments in November, was that it was conservatives and centrists who made the strongest case for West Germany's continued integration into the Western Alliance. As a result, it was conservative and moderate liberal political leaders who implemented a decision that originated among left-of-center politicians.

West German and West European conservatives continued their support for Détente, which had been initiated by Willy Brandt and continued by Helmut Schmidt. Willy Brandt's bended knee at the memorial to the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, the treaties he signed with all of the states of the Communist bloc in Europe, and the Social Democrats' advocacy of a "peace policy in Europe," went far toward changing the perception of West Germany in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, away from the revanchist, neo-fascist base for American imperialism that was such standard fare in official Communist propaganda. In this sense, the many years of Détente diplomacy also made a valuable contribution to 1989 and the willingness of Gorbachev and his advisers to engage in new thinking about foreign affairs. A balance of détente and a balance of power, of a peace policy towards Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, combined with continued support for a NATO and U.S. policy of extended nuclear deterrence, were pre-conditions for 1989. West German Social Democrats understood better, earlier and more passionately than West German conserva-

⁸ On Schumacher after World War II see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 239–60.

tives that peace in Europe demanded that the West German government acknowledge what Brandt called “the hell on earth” of the Nazi aggression and criminality in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As the Bitburg fiasco demonstrated, Kohl did not always appreciate this aspect of Detente wisdom, but he eventually did so to such an extent that Soviet leaders, however reluctantly, were willing to tolerate a unified Germany so long as the United States stayed in Europe and Germany remained a non-nuclear state. As Condoleezza Rice and Phillip Zelikow have acutely pointed out, the brilliance of the diplomacy of President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker lay in convincing Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze that it was in the Soviet Union’s interest to have the United States remain in Europe with a continued policy of extended nuclear deterrence in a unified Germany.⁹ Détente and the West German atonement and honest recognition of the crimes of the Nazi regime were also an important precondition for acceptance of the peaceful unification of Germany in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In its Harmel Report of 1967, influenced by then West German Foreign Minister Willy Brandt, NATO committed itself to a policy of Détente and sustaining a military balance of power. This balance persisted in 1983 and in 1989.

It has often been said that no experts predicted the revolutions of 1989 and the Soviet collapse of 1991. On November 29, 1983, Karl Feldmayer, the leading defense and foreign affairs correspondent for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, wrote a prophetic lead editorial. The Soviet Union, he wrote, was a world power only because of its military power. But because its military power had failed to break the alliances of its adversaries, its whole foreign policy had been undermined. Soviet leaders understood that they were not competitive with the West in political, economic and social aspects.

The neutralization of the political effect of the SS-20 program by the *Nachrüstung* [The German term for NATO’s deployments, JH] means at least the temporary collapse of the effort to extend the Soviet sphere of hegemony over all of Europe, and

⁹ Condoleezza Rice and Phillip Zelikow, *Germany Unified*.

thereby to decisively improve the basis for competition with the United States. For the challenge that Moscow faces is rivalry with America. The political collapse of the SS-20 program is of such far-reaching significance, precisely because it is obvious to political leaders and strategists that in the nuclear era Moscow can attain success against the other world power and its allies only through the use of military power (but its use in war would bring about everyone's destruction).¹⁰

Feldmeyer continued that if Western determination persisted and Soviet efforts to translate military power into political gain continued to fail, a rethinking could lead to a "new political order in Europe," including conceding "the right of self-determination to the Germans."

Serious historical scholarship on the causes of the revolutions of 1989 and the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union in 1991 requires full access to the archives of all the governments, political organizations, movements and individuals involved. In the United States and in those countries in Europe which have standard archival procedures, a delay of 30 years is customary. That development is still at least a decade away. Open access to all the relevant files of the Soviet Union may be still further in the future. In the interim, there have been, and will be, academic endeavours that rest on partial releases of some parts of the major archives. They are not a substitute for the ability of historians to be able to examine the full range of files. The claims are provisional hypotheses. An adequately documented account must wait until there is a full opening of the archives.¹¹

It is disappointing to note that one of the key battles of what was called the *Cold War* plays a small role in contemporary historical accounts. In his 2005 work, *The Cold War: A New History*, John Gaddis, one of the leading American historians of the Cold War, devotes two sentences to the NATO two-track decision of December 1979, one of which is followed by his assertion that the Soviet Union

¹⁰ Karl Feldmeyer, "Signal der Ratlosigkeit," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 29, 1983), 1; cited in Herf, *War by Other Means*, 215–16.

¹¹ For example, see Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History*.

“responded by invading Afghanistan.”¹² Gaddis does not offer evidence to support this causal connection between the NATO two-track decision and Soviet policy toward Afghanistan. The historian of the Soviet Union, Stephen Kotkin, in *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, first published in 2000 and updated in a 2008 edition, focused almost exclusively on the internal sources of the collapse of 1989.¹³ He gives the Cold War scant attention. Kotkin refers to the Soviet’s “geopolitical” dilemma as its “global superpower competition with the United States (allied with West Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Japan,” that is, against powers wealthier and more powerful than its allies.¹⁴ When Kotkin does refer to victory and defeat, it is to make the plausible argument that “by winning the Second World War, and therefore having no necessity, or feeling no desire, to change fundamentally to compete in the transformed post-war international context, the Soviet Union in a way doomed itself.”¹⁵ Kotkin offers a familiar set of woes to support the thesis that the Soviet Union “doomed itself.” They include government by an ill gerontocracy (Kotkin reports that in the 1970s, Leonid Brezhnev was working two hours a day), atrocious public health statistics, alcoholism, corruption, loss of ideological élan of Marxist-Leninist ideology, a command economy that produced goods that were not competitive on a world market, and a scientific and technological establishment which could not keep up with the third industrial revolution based on the transistor and computer chip. Kotkin does not address the arguments made at the time that Soviet resistance to internal change was due, at least in part, to the belief by Soviet leaders that the global “correlation of forces” after the American defeat in Vietnam was swinging in its direction. In Kotkin’s account, the geo-strategic dimensions of the Cold War, including the battle of the euromissiles, are absent. His focus is

¹² John Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 203 and 211. In his 1997 work, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Gaddis does not include any comment about the euromissile controversy.

¹³ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000*, updated edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

on “collapse,” not defeat. It is a rickety, drunken, decrepit power that “doomed itself,” not one that despite everything had remained a military superpower for many decades. Given his insight into the ossifying complacency that victory in World War II created in the Soviet leadership, it is disappointing that Kotkin did not reflect on the possibility that defeat in 1983 may have stimulated fresh thinking and impulses for reform at home.

In *The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Vladislav Zubok gives more attention to the connection between international and domestic politics in the last years of the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Though he devotes some attention to Soviet armament, he does not engage the important strategic literature coming from Western Europe and the United States in the 1970s and 1980s that examined its political purpose and strategic significance. After briefly presenting some facts about the Soviet military build-up of the 1970s, he writes, without detailed argument, that it did not give Moscow the “strategic superiority as neo-conservative analysts warned,” as if it was only American neo-conservatives, and not some West European Social Democrats as well, who expressed worries about Soviet armament. Instead, he writes that Brezhnev was preoccupied with preserving détente and accepts at face value that he “wanted to negotiate without blackmail.”¹⁷ He adds, echoing Soviet claims of the time, that the missile, submarine and air force build-up of the 1970s and 1980s was an effort to achieve numerical parity, but that “this was intolerable to the American side,” an assertion that restates the standard arguments of the Soviet leadership at the time.¹⁸ Zubok devotes two pages to the NATO decision of December 1979, but none to the ensuing four-year battle. Conversely, he wrote that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan “changed everything,” and devotes six pages to the topic.¹⁹ Speaking of Yuri Andropov, who apparently seriously thought that the United States was contemplating a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, Zubok refers to “the worldwide hate campaign against the Soviet

¹⁶ Vladislav M. Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 242–43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 258–64 for Zubok’s discussion of Afghanistan.

Union orchestrated by the Reagan administration” which “was the last straw for Andropov.”²⁰ He does not mention the Soviet claims of the early 1980s that stated that the United States was planning a “nuclear Auschwitz” for Europe.

In contrast to Gaddis and Kotkin, Zubok offers a tantalizing yet underdeveloped suggestion that the “international tensions of 1981 to 1983” may have played a role in Soviet new thinking. He writes that the Politburo and bureaucracies “did not want another uncontrolled confrontation with the West. They hoped it would be possible to return to détente. It also began to dawn on some officials and experts in the General Staff, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the KGB, and the Military-Industrial Commission that Soviet behavior had inadvertently contributed to the demise of détente. The decisions to deploy the SS-20 medium range missiles in Central Europe and to invade Afghanistan fell under increasing scrutiny.”²¹ [The SS-20s were not deployed in Central Europe but in the Western and Far Eastern sections of the Soviet Union, thus placing two-thirds of humanity within reach, but not the United States, JH.] Given what we know about Western efforts to warn the Soviet leadership that its armament program was placing Détente at risk, it is hard to imagine that Soviet officials believed that there was anything inadvertent about the demise of détente. Beginning in 1977, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, for one, bluntly informed Brezhnev that continuation of the Soviet build-up would undermine support for détente in Western Europe and would also help to elect conservative politicians in West Germany. The Soviet leadership in the 1970s and 1980s misjudged the situation. It assumed that a neutralist left in Western Europe was a more powerful electoral force than it turned out to be, and it underestimated the degree of electoral support for a push back against Soviet armament. It heard what it wanted to hear from Western Europe and ignored the clear signs of Western counter pressure.

As far as I know, historians have not had full access to the debates in the Soviet political, military and diplomatic leadership for the period of the euromissiles and their aftermath. Zubok cites then CIA director

²⁰ Ibid., 274.

²¹ Ibid., 280.

Robert Gates, who said it was the Strategic Defense Initiative that caused the Soviet leadership to entertain the need for change. Perhaps the threat of a not yet deployed and still unproven technological vision, which Soviet scientists did not think was feasible, was the cause; perhaps it was not. Yet it is odd that the SDI, which did not exist at the time, is mentioned more frequently than the battle of the euromissiles, which most certainly did exist. The battle of the euromissiles was one of the major confrontations in the history of the Cold War. The Soviet military and diplomatic establishment must have assessed the significance of its failure to prevent the NATO deployments, yet those assessments still appear to be classified. An adequate historical account of the Soviet era of reform, the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of Communism requires examination of the Soviet leadership's interpretation of the significant political setback it suffered in 1983.

Gaddis, Kotkin and Zubok share a disinterest in Western Europe, in the centrality of the German question in the history of the Cold War in Europe and, surprisingly in view of Gaddis' and Zubok's expertise, a lack of interest in the history of Soviet and Western political-military strategy in the era of extended nuclear deterrence. Their accounts tell us little about the impact of the Soviet build-up not only in Washington, but also in the capitals of Western Europe and NATO headquarters in Brussels. They all ignore the very public and repeated expressions of concern coming from West European governments about the political significance of the SS-20 build-up in the context of the Soviet military build-up of those years as a whole. While Kotkin's focus is on the internal collapse, Gaddis and Zubok focus on American-Soviet relations or events in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa. The result is that these prominent accounts of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet and European communism do so without giving much attention to Western Europe, which was part of the central theater of the Cold War. If, for example, the Soviet peace offensive had succeeded in undermining the NATO decision, then the Atlantic Alliance would have emerged much weakened. The Soviet leaders could have plausibly concluded that the threat of its intermediate range nuclear forces had brought major political benefits. Why should we assume that the lesson drawn from what would have been the greatest political victory for Communists in Europe since 1945 would be the need for "perestroika" and "new thinking?" Why not assume instead that a defeat of

NATO policy in 1983 would be trumpeted in Moscow as confirmation of a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of Clausewitz, namely that this war by other means had brought about a major political victory. The Soviet Union, burdened with alcoholism, an uncompetitive economy, unappealing culture and a technological development that was being out-paced in the computer era, had nevertheless proven that military power had made victory possible. In his essays about the euromissiles dispute, Raymond Aron made a series of plausible arguments regarding the Clausewitzian aspects of Soviet Marxism-Leninism. Yet to this point, historical scholarship has not yet explored his hypotheses in the context of the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the euromissile battle.²² Again, full access to the relevant archives remains in the future.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a significant and consequential body of intellectual and policy making opinion in Western Europe and the United States concluded that the Soviet Union was using its military power to seek the political goal of splitting the United States from its West European allies in order to expand its influence in Europe as well as globally. This view, which was expressed from the center left to the center right, was not the exclusive view of American neo-conservatives. By 1979, it led to a decision made by center-left political leaders to respond to a perceived threat from the Soviet Union. Western policy moved to the right rhetorically, evident in Ronald Reagan's willingness to describe the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." However, the implementation of the NATO decision in 1983 was an expression of continuity in Western policy. The Clausewitzian dimensions of the last decades of the Cold War, that is, the connection between politics, ideology, the role of force and the fear of war, remain to be fully examined. The conceptual apparatus is at hand but has, so far, played only a small role in the first historical assessments.²³

²² See Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War*, trans. by Christine Booker and Norman Stone (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985); *In Defense of Decadent Europe* (South Bend: Regency/Gateway, 1977); and "Hope and Despair in the Western Camp," *Encounter* vol. 58, no. 6 (June-July, 1982): 121-29.

²³ For an account of how the major powers interpreted and sometimes misinterpreted each other's intentions, see Gordon Barrass, *The Great Cold War: A Journey Through the Hall of Mirrors* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

More scholarship is necessary as to the possible connection between Western containment, the deployments of 1983, and the solidarity of the Western Alliance on the one hand, and the rise of Gorbachev and the willingness of Soviet leaders to initiate domestic reform on the other hand. If the outcome of 1983 did lead to Soviet rethinking, then the outcome of the battle of the euromissiles should be seen as one of the preconditions for the era of reform and the collapse of Communism in Europe from 1989 to 1991. Indeed, it should be seen as a key chapter in the much longer history of central Western policy towards the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War, namely that of containment and the exertion of counter pressure to Soviet initiatives in the core geographical areas of the global balance of power. Of course, the dissident movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself were of decisive significance for the revolutions and implosions of 1989. But if the solidarity of the Atlantic Alliance had fractured in the early 1980s under Soviet pressure, it is unlikely that Eastern Europe would have been able to rise up in 1989.

American historians of the end of the Cold War focus attention on Gorbachev's pleasant surprise at discovering that Ronald Reagan did not fit the stereotype of the imperialist warmonger depicted in Soviet propaganda, and that his 1981 "zero-zero" option was a serious proposal and not a negotiating gimmick. Yet another precondition for a basic change in Soviet thinking about Western Europe was one that had been evolving since Willy Brandt initiated *neue Ostpolitik* in 1969, a policy continued by Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl. West Germany and the citizens of West Germany had become a different society and polity from the one that invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. The Kohl government's determination to combine integration into the Western alliance with continuation of Détente towards the East was also a challenge to the ideological orthodoxy of the Brezhnev era. During the battle of the euromissiles, Soviet leaders from Brezhnev to Andropov presented West European and West German membership in the NATO Alliance and the American policy of extended nuclear deterrence as a threat to the Soviet Union and to peace. From 1989 to 1991, in the complex negotiations regarding German unification and the end of the Cold War, President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker convinced Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, of exactly the opposite,

namely, that continued West German membership in NATO and continued American presence in Europe would be a stabilizing factor for the continent and for the Soviet Union. These Soviet leaders had changed their views of both the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. In years to come, as the archives of the governments involved are opened, historians will be in a much better position than we are now to explain the connections between the outcome of 1983, the revolutions of 1989, and the collapse of Communism in 1991 in the Soviet Union. The evidence at our disposal suggests that success was definitely not an orphan.

A. ROSS JOHNSON

*“No One is Afraid to Talk to Us Anymore”
Radio Free Europe in 1989*

Background

Radio Free Europe began broadcasting to Eastern Europe in 1950. Radio Liberty began broadcasting to the USSR in 1953. In 1976, the two stations were merged as RFE/RL, Inc., but RFE and RL remained separate operating units. By the end of the 1960s they had become seasoned substitute free national radios, commonly called surrogate broadcasters, focused primarily not on the United States or international issues (as were the Voice of America and the BBC World Service) but on developments in the countries to which they broadcast. They had recruited talented staff, organized a flow of information from the closed societies to which they broadcast, and attracted significant audiences. Their mission was to provide their listeners with a link to the West, to keep hope of freedom alive, and to promote evolutionary change toward what after 1989 would be called a Europe whole and free.¹

It was in the 1970s and 1980s, as dissent and opposition groupings and movements developed in Eastern Europe and the USSR, that the Radios demonstrated their full value as amplifiers of dissent from as well as providers of, outside information to the region. They became mega-

¹ The origins and early history of RFE and RL are discussed in A. Ross Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty; the CIA Years and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press and the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010); Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom; The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Sig Mickelson, *America's Other Voice; The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

phones conveying censored voices from Eastern Europe and the USSR back to those countries. RFE broadcasts to Poland and Romania had the largest audiences and the most impact. In Poland, individual dissent began to coalesce into organized opposition with the founding of the Committee for the Defense of Workers, KOR, in 1976, and the emergence of Solidarity, soon encompassing ten million people, in 1980–1981. Romania under an increasingly repressive Ceaușescu regime, on the other hand, remained an atomized society with only individual voices of protest. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, RFE helped spread the message of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. It extensively covered both “goulash communism” reforms and dissidents in Hungary. It achieved real political impact in Bulgaria only when indigenous dissent developed in the late 1980s. Broadcasts to the Baltic States—begun within Radio Liberty in 1976 but transferred in RFE in the early 1980s—covered the rise of national self-assertion and political dissent throughout the 1980s.²

The Tipping Point

1989 is properly celebrated as the year that marked the end of Communism in Eastern Europe. But the tipping point came two years earlier, in 1987. Four factors were crucial. Heightened civic consciousness led to social self-organization on a large scale in several countries – Solidarity in Poland and Popular Fronts in the Baltic States, especially Sajudis in Lithuania. The Communist regimes, weakened as their economic systems proved unable to compete with the West, tried to reform but only succeeded in demonstrating that their economic and political systems were unreformable.³ Gorbachev began to call into question the ultimate guarantor of Communist rule in Eastern

² See the country chapters in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, eds., *Cold War Broadcasting; Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A Collection of Studies and Documents* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010) for a discussion of the impact of the various RFE and RL services in the 1970s and 1980s.

³ Demoralization of the Communist elites is stressed in Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Random House, 2009).

Europe—Soviet military power. And communication between Eastern and Western Europe became easier, especially with the introduction of direct dial telephone systems.

These developments allowed RFE to report not just about but now directly from the region. Continuing to serve as a megaphone for censored indigenous voices, RFE now also began to provide independent on-the-spot reporting. RFE Polish Service head Marek Latyński noted in an internal RFE/RL memorandum in early 1988, “There is no curtain of silence anymore. Nobody is afraid to talk to us.”⁴ In one notable instance, Polish Service correspondent Maciej Morawski, calling from Paris, was able to interview Polish dissident Jacek Kuroń at 5:05 pm on April 27, 1988, as secret police broke into his apartment and arrested him. RFE had the interview on the air ten minutes later. In 1988, RFE was able to interview by telephone 190 prominent Poles living in Poland (along with 86 in the emigration) and regularly aired reports from informal correspondents inside Poland itself. It obtained better feedback from listeners, setting up telephone answering machines to record comments from listeners who could now dial Munich without going through an operator. On-the-spot reporting greatly improved RFE’s coverage of local developments. A veteran Polish domestic radio broadcaster commented:

I shifted from RFI [Radio France International] to RFE. Not only because it broadcasts all day with newscasts every hour. This old radio man was impressed by his colleagues from Munich with their professional skill, inventiveness, and honesty. This was true radio. Instantaneous information with attribution of sources, and if information was not unequivocal, then various sources were given. We learned the news not only from newscasts. In fact, every program was interrupted for the latest reports. Indeed, RFE journalists did not wait for news agency dispatches. They developed a colossal telephone activity with the entire world and above all with Poland or with Solidarity activists in the West, requesting on-the-spot commentaries.⁵

⁴ See also Marek Latyński, *Ogród Angielski. 1. Wspomnienia z Radia Wolna Europa* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 1997), 133.

⁵ “Prawdziwe radio,” *Solidarność Radia i Telewizji*, Nr. 24, 1988.

In 1988, Munich-based RFE journalists were able for the first time to travel to and report from the countries to which they had been broadcasting for years. Hungary came first. Following a visit to Hungary by RFE/RL President E. Eugene Pell in October 1988, Hungarian Service editor Levente Kasza was interviewed in a local newspaper in February 1989⁶ and received a journalist visa in April. Moreover, during the trip he was able to make appointments himself without official “assistance.”⁷ In May, Hungarian Politburo Member Imre Pozsgay gave RFE an interview in which he advocated transforming the Communist Party into a Socialist Party (resulting in a public rebuke from Party first secretary Károly Grósz).⁸ That same month I traveled to Budapest with Hungarian Service director László Ribansky to arrange with Hungarian officials opening a news bureau in Budapest—an event we celebrated in September. In August, a new independent Hungarian weekly published the full RFE Hungarian program schedule.⁹ Throughout 1989, the Hungarian Service gave full coverage to reform currents within the Party, emerging civic groups, dissidents still banned from the domestic media, the reburial of Imre Nagy on June 19, and the opening of the Hungarian-Austrian border. RFE also sought in commentary to debunk the notion of a military threat from Romania that reformist leaders Horn and Szűrös were spreading in an evident appeal to nationalist sentiment.¹⁰ By October 1989, almost all Hungarian Service programs on Hungarian affairs were produced by staffers or freelancers in Hungary, transmitted to Munich through the new Budapest bureau.

⁶ *Tér-Kép*, February 2, 1989.

⁷ Interview with Patricia Howard of RFE, April 26, 1989, RFE/RL news feature F-530.

⁸ AP dispatch, May 30, 1989. The Pozsgay interview with Levente Kasza was broadcast on May 27, 1989. Excerpts in English in RFE Research note, “RFE Interview with Hungarian Politburo Member Imre Pozsgay,” RFE feature F-534. RFE carried an interview with National Assembly Chairman Mátyás Szűrös on July 14. (RFE Background Report 127, July 20, 1989, <http://osaarchivum.org/background-reports?col=8&id=36181>.)

⁹ *Napló* (Szeged), August 25, 1989.

¹⁰ RFE/RL Memorandum, Office of the Director, RFE, “Policy Note on Hungarian-Romanian Military Relations,” n.d. [July 1989]. RFE/RL memoranda cited are in my personnel files and/or in the RFE/RL Collection, Hoover Archives.

The Baltic republics came second. Toomas Hendrick Ilves, head of RFE's Estonian Service who is today the president of Estonia, was able to interview dissidents on the ground in Tallinn in late 1988.¹¹ The Service carried an interview with historian Mart Laar in Tallinn on Soviet atrocities. It organized international roundtables, such as on March 17, 1989, with commentators in Tallinn, Stockholm, and Munich that discussed the plight of expelled dissidents. The Estonian Party daily, *Rahva Haal*, carried an interview on May 2, 1989, with RFE's Estonian Service freelancer in Finland noting the challenge RFE faced in retaining resonance but avoiding incitement as the domestic Estonian press was opening up. The Lithuanian Service carried interviews with members of Sajudis, the Church hierarchy (including Cardinal Vincentas Slakdevicius), and various unofficial groups. The Latvian Service obtained eyewitness accounts of the June 14 demonstration in Riga commemorating the "Day of Deportation."

Any doubt that RFE and RL had entered a new era ended with the cessation of Soviet bloc radio jamming (technical radio interference) in November 1988 at Gorbachev's direction. RFE and RL could now, for the first time in their history, be heard clearly throughout the entire region.¹² It became even more important for RFE to ensure that its broadcasts were both responsible and relevant for their audiences.

Challenges for Broadcasters

These dramatically altered circumstances required changes in RFE operations. First was a reexamination of broadcast priorities. My own priority ranking of the RFE services in early 1989 was 1) Baltic republics, Hungary, Poland; 2) Czechoslovakia; 3) Bulgaria, Romania (and Moldova). I saw RFE's mission as first of all "promoting change (de-Leninization, political pluralism, end of Soviet empire) through our broadcasts in key areas where change was ongoing or imminent over

¹¹ "RFED Language Service Chief Returns from Trip to Estonia," *Shortwaves* [RFE/RL's in-house publication], January 1989.

¹² Jamming in Romania and Hungary had ended in the mid-1960s. Local jamming had ended in Poland in 1956, but jamming of Polish broadcasts had continued from the USSR.

attempting to focus most on states or areas where the old systems remain intact ... We should be aiming to reinforce democratic breakthroughs where these are most likely.”¹³ It was a measure of the pace of change, the compression of time in 1989 that eight months later this ranking had become irrelevant, and Czechoslovakia and Romania had become equally important.

Second, a new relationship developed between RFE and the opposition movements in the region. Earlier, dissidents and opposition groups gratefully looked to RFE as an uncensored outlet for their views, as a megaphone. Now, they sought to influence RFE’s coverage of their countries as well. In a private letter to RFE in April 1989, for example, Charter 77 spokespersons offered a number of concrete program suggestions.¹⁴ Solidarity spokespersons gave RFE specific suggestions on how best to cover its candidates in the 1989 Polish parliamentary election. RFE’s challenge was to take full advantage of such suggestions while not abdicating its own editorial responsibility for what went on the air.

Third, there was the need to address certain misgivings and missteps at RFE, as broadcasters who had been banned from contact with their home countries could now involve themselves directly with sources and listeners. Initially, some broadcasters feared that RFE reporting would be compromised if journalists were stationed in Eastern Europe. Twenty-eight members of the Hungarian Service editorial staff signed a letter to Malcolm S. Forbes, Jr. (Chairman of the Board for International Broadcasting, the federal oversight body for RFE/RL) to that effect in January 1988.¹⁵ But this was a minority view, and in any case RFE/RL management resolved to move East—obtaining journalist visas, stationing correspondents, and opening bureaus as quickly as possible.

¹³ RFE/RL memorandum, “Priorities,” August 31, 1989, drafted initially in spring 1989.

¹⁴ Letter to the RFE Czechoslovak Service Director from Charter 77 Spokespersons Tomas Hradilek, Dana Nemcova, Šáša Vondra, Prague, April 10, 1989.

¹⁵ “We sincerely believe that stationing or regularly sending an officially accredited RFE correspondent to Hungary could easily be exploited by the Communist regime.” (Letter dated January 22, 1988).

Fourth and most important was the need to reinforce key editorial principles that had guided RFE broadcasts since the 1950s and that were specified in the RFE/RL Professional Code.¹⁶ Broadcasters were reminded of the need to avoid gratuitous personal criticism of Communist leaders and emotional bombast (flaws in several Romanian programs in July 1989).¹⁷ They were reminded of the need for journalistic honesty and professionalism (ignored by a Czechoslovak Service free-lance broadcaster who misrepresented himself in obtaining telephone comments from individuals in Czechoslovakia and then broadcasting them).¹⁸ It was their responsibility to evaluate carefully the plausibility and veracity of information provided by telephone, especially from a single source in the broadcast region. Coverage of demonstrations was an especially sensitive issue, calling for a case-by-case approach intended to limit RFE's role to reporting and not organizing demonstrations. As a general rule, RFE covered peaceful demonstrations by groups advocating democratic values and with a significant popular following. And broadcasters had to avoid taking sides, or becoming a participant, in the emerging democratic political systems at home.¹⁹

1989

Before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, RFE provided its listeners with comprehensive information about the changes sweeping Eastern Europe and, in doing so, showed them

¹⁶ Updated version adopted by the Board for International Broadcasting on May 18, 1987.

¹⁷ E.g., a program on June 30 that unfavorably compared Ceaușescu to Stalin and Hitler for “systematically organiz[ing] the biological and cultural genocide of his own nation”; a program on June 29 alleging “routine slaughter” of refugees at the Romanian-Hungarian border; an *ad hominem* attack on an official in a program in June. (RFE/RL Broadcast Analysis Department memoranda of July 12, 13, 14, 1989.)

¹⁸ *RFE/RL Memorandum*, January 18, 1989.

¹⁹ *RFE/RL Memorandum* by William M. Marsh [Executive Vice President for Programs and Policy], February 23, 1989. Broadcasters were also enjoined from organizing roundtables with outside contributors in crisis situations, from facilitating requests for political asylum, and from encouraging defections.

the new horizons that were opening up and demonstrated the scope of the support for change in the region. RFE detailed the flight of East Germans to West German embassies around Eastern Europe. It reported indications from Moscow—downplayed in local media—that the Red Army would not intervene to prop up failing communist regimes as it had in the past. It is arguably thanks to RFE broadcasts in part that the communist regimes were unable to keep the various protests isolated from one another or to marginalize opposition figures by restricting circulation of their ideas.

Three cases of RFE reporting in 1989 are particularly illustrative of its role. First, in the spring of 1989, RFE's Polish Service provided comprehensive coverage of the Polish "roundtable" between representatives of the regime and those of the Solidarity movement. Marek Latyński broadcast a series of measured commentaries on the "roundtable" that were recognized as such in a Polish regime internal monitoring bulletin.²⁰ The Polish Service attempted, unsuccessfully, to arrange an interview in February with Alexander Kwaśniewski, a Party reformer (later President of Poland) who participated in the Round Table talks. That same month RFE explored conducting an interview with Party first secretary Mieczysław Rakowski (but regime spokesman Jerzy Urban rejected the idea as premature). It provided media exposure for non-Communist Party candidates in the June parliamentary elections—all blacklisted by the state media—and at the suggestion of Solidarity spokesmen emphasized the lesser-known candidates. By so doing, RFE helped make those elections freer and fairer and thus contributed to Solidarity's victory.²¹

²⁰ "They featured the views and positions of the opposition [but] the information and opinion [on the round table] was presented in a calm, factual tone and as a rule did not contain attacks on the regime side." *Analiza dywersyjnego oddziaływania propagandowego zachodnich rozgłosni polski-jezycznych w styczniu 1989 roku* [Analysis of subversive activities of Polish-Language western propaganda stations in February 1989], Warsaw, March 5, 1989, copy at the Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw.

²¹ The Polish regime was less happy with RFE's coverage of the elections. A Polish government spokesman (ignoring the biased coverage in domestic Polish media) complained that "RFE has been conducting the election campaign for Solidarity for many hours a day, and fiercely fighting non-opposition candidates by fair means and foul." I responded: "We provide

Latyński traveled to Poland in July to cover the visit of President George H.W. Bush, and other Polish Service broadcasters obtained Polish visas. Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, who had established the Polish Service in Munich in 1952 and directed it until 1976, was welcomed as a hero when he revisited Poland for the first time since 1944. RFE initiated discussion with the Rakowski regime on opening a bureau in Warsaw, but the question became moot with the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's Solidarity government on September 12. I visited Poland in early October (along with four others from RFE and the Board for International Broadcasting) to call on Mazowiecki government officials in Warsaw and Lech Wałęsa in Gdansk. RFE was then able to post regular correspondents in Poland.²² It established a news bureau headed by veteran journalist Maciej Wierzyński and officially celebrated that event at the Royal Castle in May 1990.

In the second case, two weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, RFE's Czechoslovak Service was able to provide unique on-the-spot coverage of the Velvet Revolution. RFE had reported on growing demoralization within the Communist Party and increasing social unrest earlier in the year. It drew on information provided by an independent press agency set up in Prague by dissidents. It carried an interview with Václav Havel after his release from prison in July. It broadcast information leaked from high Party circles—including a tape recording of Party first secretary Jakeš' incoherent remarks at a private gathering in which he complained that he was increasingly isolated in the Soviet bloc (“Sometimes I feel like the last post in a fence.”).²³ RFE reported the violent police suppression of a peaceful demonstra-

voters the factual information they may lack about many candidates, and about a complex election process, to enable them to resist manipulation and make a free and informed choice.” (RFE/RL Central News item, CN 42, May 30, 1989.)

²² RFE/RL Memorandum, “Trip Report – Poland,” October 17, 1989; “Radios to Open News Bureau in Warsaw,” *Shortwaves*, October 1989. Veteran Polish Service broadcaster Jacek Kalabiński filed 36 stories from Poland in 14 days in October. An Interior Ministry spokesperson commented to Kalabiński in one interview, “My God, if I had been talking to you only six months ago, I’d have to arrest myself.” (*International Herald Tribune*, January 6–7, 1990).

²³ Independent News Service dispatch, *Toronto Star*, (October 23, 1989).

tion in Prague on November 17 (and inadvertently carried false reports that a student, Martin Šmíd, had been killed).²⁴ The reports of violence outraged the country and led to the ensuing mass demonstrations on Wenceslas Square.

In a fortunate accident of history, and an indication that the apparatus of coercion was disintegrating, the authorities granted a visa to Czechoslovak Service head Pavel Pecháček to cover the presentation of a Swedish award to Havel and the celebration of the canonization of Saint Agnes in Prague. Pechacek arrived on November 21 and, with domestic media still tightly controlled, he provided the only uncensored coverage of the crucial first three days of the Velvet Revolution demonstrations. His reports were a model of calm, professional journalism at a momentous historical juncture.²⁵ If not for his reports, the country might never have realized the scope of the movement and its momentum might have dissipated. As in Poland, RFE then quickly established a news bureau in Prague, headed by Czechoslovak Service broadcaster and former BBC journalist Peter Brod. It celebrated the opening of the bureau with Havel and other leaders of democratic Czechoslovakia in May 1990.

What was remarkable about 1989 was not the fact that the Communist regimes disappeared, but that they did so almost overnight and, with one exception, without violence. The exception was Romania in December. By the late 1970s, the Ceaușescu regime had become the most repressive in the region and RFE had—notwithstanding threats and physical attacks commissioned by the Ceaușescu regime on RFE broadcasters and the Munich building—become a unique source of uncensored information for Romanians. In 1989 RFE could draw on that record and listenership—the largest of any RFE service. It carried voices of dissent within the Romanian Communist elite, famously

²⁴ The Czechoslovak Service did its best to get the story right rather than first. It sat on it most of the day seeking confirmation and then, with Reuter and VOA using it, also ran the story. See http://www.rferl.org/content/off_mic_smid_death_story/1879520.html.

²⁵ When Pechacek asked on November 24 for an extension of his visa, he was promptly expelled from the country. A week later, the Velvet Revolution had triumphed, and he was back in Prague. *Mlada fronta dnes* (Prague, June 8, 2009); http://www.rferl.org/content/off_mic_front_row_seat_to_revolution/1881688.html.

the "Letter of the Six" authored by Silviu Brucan and signed by five other former leading Communists, on March 13.²⁶ It provided comprehensive reporting on the peaceful revolutions in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. On November 30 the Romanian service broadcast a detailed report on the Velvet Revolution, contrasting it with the stagnation in Romania. I responded at the time to criticism within RFE that the program was provocative in words quoted here to illustrate how RFE sought to encourage peaceful democratic change while avoiding incitement:

This program was the first of a series of special programs intended to strengthen our cross-reporting and other programming to Romania, as the last bastion of Communist orthodoxy in Eastern Europe. I did intend the program to contrast the revolutionary changes in Czechoslovakia with the non-happenings in Romania. We know the power of cross-reporting. Czechoslovaks have testified to the importance of the popular protests in the GDR in unleashing change in Czechoslovakia. We obviously do not intend the explicit contrasts as prescription, and I do not think they are interpretable as such. Neither do I think we should avoid explicit comparisons based on assumptions about a passive Romanian political culture or propensity to violent crackdown by the regime. Both were widely assumed to be the case in Czechoslovakia as well. Invidious comparisons between the political system in Romania and the rest of Eastern Europe today are certainly justified. This can sometimes be more effective at the micro level ... than at the macro level.²⁷

Just as the Romanian Service was preparing a series of programs for the rest of the year on the peaceful demise of Communism elsewhere

²⁶ Text and analysis in RFE Situation Report, Romania, SR/3, March 29, 1989. Brucan delivered the letter to the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest on March 2, and Ambassador Kirk forwarded it to RFE/RL via the Munich Consulate. See Roger Kirk and Mircea Răceanu, *Romania versus the United States; Diplomacy of the Absurd 1985–1989* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994). We delayed broadcasting it until we could confirm that Brucan wanted us to do so.

²⁷ RFE/RL Memorandum, December 7, 1989.

in Eastern Europe,²⁸ the first news of demonstrations in Timișoara reached Munich. The spark was the attempt by the Ceaușescu regime to silence a troublesome priest – dissident ethnic Hungarian pastor László Tőkés. Tőkés resisted, proclaiming that “It is enough that I speak; I shall destroy this wall of fear.” His supporters gathered around his house on December 15 and 16, and took to the streets of Timișoara on December 17. The response of the Ceaușescu regime was to crush the demonstration brutally, using live ammunition.

Central News correspondent Roland Eggleston was dispatched from Budapest (where he headed the new RFE bureau) to interview refugees at the Hungarian border. But Eggleston kept going. Romania had closed its borders on December 16, but 60 Deutsch Marks for the Romanian border guard got him a visa and the advice “Be careful. They are shooting out there.” His RFE identification card gave him access to the Timișoara hospital where the dead and wounded were located, and people cheered when they learned he was there. Once back in Yugoslavia, he phoned Munich with detailed reports.²⁹ Meanwhile, the Romanian Service received its own reports, including a dramatic smuggled recording of police and army violence against peaceful demonstrators that was first broadcast on December 20 and repeated many times thereafter.³⁰

During the critical week that followed, RFE strengthened its signal to Romania by borrowing transmitters from its other language services. It provided Romanians with information totally censored in local media that fuelled growing protests in Bucharest that by the end of December had led to the ouster (and death) of Ceaușescu. Credit is due to then-director of the Romanian Service, Nicolae Stroescu, broadcaster Emil Hurezeanu, and their colleagues for their professionalism during those dramatic days. They provided comprehensive

²⁸ *RFE/RL Memorandum* from Nicolae Stroescu [director of the Romanian Service], “Strengthening the Effectiveness of Romanian Broadcasts,” December 13, 1989.

²⁹ Eggleston recounted his experience in *Shortwaves*, January 1990, and in communications to the author in 2009.

³⁰ Copy in the Hoover Archives; audio and transcription at: <http://www.euro-palibera.org/content/article/1827121.html>. I have yet to meet a Romanian who lived in the country in 1989 who does not remember listening to that broadcast.

information on Romanian developments to the Romanian audience. But they were well aware that exaggeration and emotion could translate information into incitement. RFE avoided the exaggerated death figures from the demonstrations used by much of the international media that would have discredited the programs.³¹ The reporting and commentary of the Romanian Service was restrained and balanced. Listening to recordings of the programs after two decades, one is struck by the calm tone and avoidance of the emotionalism that marred RFE's 1956 Hungarian broadcasts. RFE's broadcasts to Romania in December 1989 were both responsible and influential precisely because the Romanian Service broadcasters knew how to report the story while keeping themselves out of it.

During those crucial days of December 1989, RFE directed special programs to the Romanian military and security forces, reminding them of their professional duty not to turn their weapons against civilians and noting the positive examples of other armies during the peaceful revolutions that had unfolded earlier that year in the region. This was a case of purposeful, focused political programming. The information was objective and balanced, but it was selected and broadcast for a specific purpose in specific circumstances. While there is no way to judge the full impact, RFE received reports of soldiers listening to these broadcasts, and many Romanians credit RFE with helping to avert even more violent reactions from the police and military.

Ceaușescu's final days posed an unexpected dilemma for RFE. Ceaușescu fled the Romanian Party Central Committee building on December 22, and RFE carried the first report of his flight from Bucharest, phoned in by a Bucharest journalist. RFE then began to receive reports about his whereabouts, some of which were broadcast. (National Salvation Front officials telephoned RFE several times to ask us to repeat information that they had not heard clearly). RFE in effect became a communications center between listeners and the emerging post-Ceaușescu National Salvation Front. It received telephone calls from Securitate officers around Europe who (attempting to flee the sinking ship of the regime) offered information on Securitate

³¹ Hungarian TV alleged that 4600 bodies had been buried in a mass grave in Timișoara. RFE reported a few hundred casualties. The official final death count was 128.

hideouts. Many of these were in private residences, and while RFE did not broadcast their locations, it did pass them on to the new National Salvation Front. This was not normal journalism. As I explained at the time, “We were the only available middleman who could play that role ... and make sure Ceaușescu would not return ... [It was] one of those judgments one makes in exceptional circumstances.”³²

Helping “Little People” Do

RFE/RL has often been praised by key participants in the dramatic events of 1989 for its contribution to ending the Cold War in Europe. Speaking in Washington in the fall of 1989, Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa said “the degree [of RFE’s influence] cannot even be described. Would there be an Earth without the sun?”³³ Other former dissidents who later became leaders in the democratic countries of Central Europe, including Václav Havel, have lauded RFE in similar terms.³⁴ Then President of Romania, Emil Constantinescu, said in Prague in 1997 that what defeated Communism was the power of free words and beliefs, and that in communicating those things RFE was Washington’s most important investment during the Cold War. A Swiss foundation gave its annual freedom price to RFE/RL in 1990 for promoting “the fundamental right to free information and freedom of expression, which ... has made a major contribution to winning respect for this right in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.”³⁵

³² “Radio Free Europe Adjusts to a Freer Europe,” by Mathew C. Vita, *Cox Newspapers*, January 28, 1990. Details in RFE/RL memorandum by Robert Gillette [RFE deputy director], January 10, 1990; editorial, *Wall Street Journal* (European edition), January 11, 1990.

³³ *The Failure of Communism; the Western Response. An International Conference Sponsored by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Fund*, November 15, 1989, Washington, D.C. (RFE/RL Fund, December 1989, 47).

³⁴ Video greetings to the 2004 Hoover Institution-Woodrow Wilson Center conference on Cold War Broadcasting, <http://hoorferl.stanford.edu/cooperation.php>.

³⁵ http://www.ms-foundation.org/domains/ms-foundation_org/data/free_docs/radio_liberty_laudatio_de.pdf

Reflecting on the events of 1989, Timothy Garton Ash wrote that "In the nine months that gave birth to a new world, from February to November 1989, the United States and the Soviet Union were largely passive observers. They made history by what they did not do. And both giants stood back partly because they underestimated the significance of things being done by little people in little countries."³⁶ RFE/RL's contribution and merit was arguably that it did understand that significance and that, drawing on decades of experience, broadcast relevant information and perspectives that helped make possible the peaceful self-liberation of Eastern Europe.

³⁶ Timothy Garton Ash, "1989!" *The New York Review of Books* vol. 56, no. 17 (November 5, 2009): 4–8.

Part Three

INTERPRETING EASTERN
EUROPEAN CONTEXTS OF
1989

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU
and
BOGDAN CRISTIAN IACOB

*Revisiting the Nature and Legacies of
the Ceaușescu Regime*

I. Preliminaries

The nature of the 1989 Romanian revolution and its aftermath reflect the specific features of the communist regime in the country. Its essential elements constituted a national Stalinist synthesis: the unflinching emphasis on the party's leading role; Nicolae Ceaușescu's personality cult resulting in dynastic communism; the celebration of the "socialist homogenous nation"; and politics of pauperization. In contrast to most Leninist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Romanian one never renounced its ethos of radical transformism (Robert C. Tucker) and the obsession with building the "New Man." The Romanian Communist Party compensated the growing popular discontent with the betrayed promises of 1968 still born liberalization through ever-renewed social engineering.¹ It, therefore, opposed the post-1985 attempts at democratization (as in the case of the Moscow Center after Gorbachev came to power), and it deviated from the systemic sclerosis of the GDR, Czechoslovakia, or Bulgaria. A mythic, unified socialist nation was to reach the peaks of History through the realization of the RCP's project of modernization, epitomized in the concept of the "Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society." A *sui generis* version of political religion,² Ceaușescu's inter-

¹ Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob, "Betrayed Promises: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian Communist Party, and the Crisis of 1968," in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion and Utopia* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 257–83.

² According to Italian historian Emilio Gentile political religions are "a form of the sacralization of politics of an exclusive and integralist character. It

pretation of Marxism-Leninism, was the functionalist-pragmatic ideological framework for a national eschatology that baroquely combined themes of the far right and the far left. The regime's politics of mobilization converged into the only true center of power: *Conducătorul*—the Leader (and increasingly his spouse and their clan). In Ceaușescu's cult, Stalinism and Byzantinism culminated in a synthesis of exacerbated ambition, megalomaniac tyranny, and self-serving, strident nationalism.

More often than not, there is a tendency to dismiss the Romanian experiment in autocracy as a historical anomaly, a phenomenon that acquired its own developmental trajectory rather uncharacteristic of the general evolution of Soviet-style regimes.³ The present contribution to this ongoing discussion argues that Nicolae Ceaușescu, as leader of

rejects coexistence with other political ideologies and movements, denies the autonomy of the individual with respect to the collective, prescribes the obligatory observance of its commandments and participation in its political cult, and sanctifies violence as a legitimate arm of the struggle against enemies, and as an instrument of regeneration. Emilio Gentile, "Political Religion: A Concept and its Critics—A Critical Survey," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 6, no. 1 (June 2005): 19–32, esp. 30; see also Emilio Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion," *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 25 (1990): 229–51.

³ Here, we can take into account two examples that determine to a certain extent the pale of argumentation about Ceaușescu's estrangement from communism, or, for that matter, "really existing socialism." There is, on the one hand, the recently re-affirmed position of Miklós Gáspár Tamás, the former Hungarian dissident (born in Transylvania and a political refugee from Romania), who claimed that the features of Ceaușescu's regime hardly had anything to do with "communism as an international phenomenon and revolutionary idea." For example, see his article "Un delict de opinie," *Revista 22* (20 July 2010). On the other hand, there is the classical argument about Ceaușescu's regime as a case of sultanism, therefore leaving ideology out of the analytic picture. See Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). One also could mention Katherine Verdery's position, who argued that in Ceaușescu's Romania a process of "indigenization of Marxism" took place, that is, "the subordination of the imposed Marxist-Leninist discourse to the terms of the national discourse, resulting in the subversion of Marxism-Leninism's central terms." See Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 139.

the Romanian Communist Party, rather exacerbated and carried to an extreme certain characteristics of Stalinism's political culture within the specific Romanian context. In other words, Ceaușescu's socialism could be seen as a totalitarian experience Romanian-style: a combination of Stalinism, Third World-ism, and Byzantinism that at certain moments reached out to significant strata of the population beyond the party and Securitate bureaucracies. It is important therefore to go past the mere blaming of the late leader and to try to fathom the inner logic of the history of communism in Romania.

Before his accession to the office of general secretary in March 1965, Ceaușescu had carved out a successful career for himself in the communist bureaucracy, and he skillfully succeeded Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej—one of Eastern Europe's most adroit communist maneuvers. Like Stalin in 1923–24, Ceaușescu was the figurehead of the apparatus and the guarantor of its younger members' chances of moving up in the hierarchy by getting rid of the old-timers.⁴ Ceaușescu's success in the Romanian communist elite and his victory over potent rivals in the struggles that followed Gheorghiu-Dej's death were foreshadowed, predetermined, and facilitated by the party's history of unmitigated commitment to the exclusive logic of Stalinism. The "paranoid style" in Romanian Leninist politics was rooted in an underdog mentality, problematic national credentials, long subservience to Moscow as the Mecca of proletarian internationalism, and deep distrust of anything smacking of democratization or liberalization. This complex set of issues manifested itself not only in the RCP's inordinate concern with authenticity and genealogy, but also, on a more general level, in the endless fixation on national identity and historical predestination among the Romanian intelligentsia, communist, noncommunist, and anticommunist alike. This pariah syndrome⁵ is

⁴ On Nicolae Ceaușescu's evolution within the ranks of the Romanian communist party see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also Mary Ellen Fischer, *Nicolae Ceaușescu: A Study in Political Leadership* (Boulder: L. Rienner, 1989), Pavel Câmpeanu, *Anii numărătorii inverse* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), and Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989. Geniul Carpatilor* (Iași: Polirom, 2011).

⁵ Ken Jowitt was the first to make the argument that the Romanian communist political culture could never overcome its pariah status. See Kenneth

perhaps the main explanation for Ceaușescu's grotesque behavior during the last decade of his reign. Both in theory and in practice, Ceaușescu's reign was a desperate attempt by a beleaguered elite to win domestic authority and international recognition by emphasizing precisely that quality it had most conspicuously lacked for most of its history: national prestige and influence.

The *Conducător's* xenophobic outbursts, romanticization of Romania's archaic past, identification with mythological Thracian-Dacian chieftains and despotic feudal princes, fascination with organic corporatism, and rehabilitation of militaristic and ethnic symbols had deeper sources than Ceaușescu's personal psychology. They originated in the RCP's problematic relationship with Romanian cultural traditions and patterns. Following Gheorghiu-Dej's obstinate anti-Kruschevism, Ceaușescu pursued a policy of constant rejection of any genuine reforms, a line of neo-Stalinist, autarchic retrenchment that included elements of nepotism, kleptocracy, and corruption characteristic of Brezhnevite "neo-traditionalism." Starting in the late 1950s, and evolving in a convoluted and sometimes perplexing way which made it increasingly self-centered and self-enclosed, Romanian domesticism turned out to be a "conservative" (almost "reactionary") political strategy devised to preserve and enhance precisely those values, symbols, and institutions questioned by the proponents of "socialism with a human face," from Imre Nagy and Alexander Dubcek to Mikhail Gorbachev.

II. Understanding National Stalinism

In the late 1980s, with the Soviet Union launching dramatic reforms, Ceaușescu excoriated Gorbachevism as a most dangerous "right-wing deviation" in world communism, and proclaimed the vital need to

Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development. The Case of Romania 1944–1965* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1971) and *New World Disorder. The Leninist extinction* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992). For a development of Jowitt's arguments see Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Understanding National Stalinism: Reflections on Ceaușescu's socialism," *Communism and Post-Communism Studies* vol. 32 (1999): 155–73.

reassert uniformity. Speaking in 1988, he lambasted attempts to revise the Marxist-Leninist tenets:

We must bear in mind that there are a number of theoretical and practical deviations, both on the right and on the left. Of course, both of them are equally dangerous ... However, it is my opinion that the main danger today comes from the rightist deviations, which can seriously harm socialist construction and the struggle for disarmament, peace, and mankind's overall progress.⁶

The same man who in 1974 had admitted the obsolescence of the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and seemed inclined to favor the Eurocommunist search for an alternative Marxism, now called for the reinforcement of repressive institutions and denounced the transition to pluralism as a restoration of capitalism. Indeed, in his opposition to Gorbachev's semi-Menshevik, revisionist offensive, Ceaușescu carried to an extreme the logic of what might be called *national Stalinism*.⁷

As a political variety of Leninism, national Stalinism systematically opposed any form of liberalization, let alone democratization. Reactionary and self-centered, it valued autarky and exclusiveness. It adhered to a militaristic vision both domestically and internationally. National Stalinism clung to a number of presumably universal laws of socialist revolution and treated any "deviation" from these as a betrayal of class principles. It voiced political anguish and played on sentiments of national isolation, humiliation, and panic. It frequently tempted Leninist elites in countries where the pre-Stalinist radical left had been weak or virtually nonexistent, or where the regime's legitimacy derived from external sources, such as Romania, Albania, North Korea

⁶ *Scînteia*, May 4, 1988, 1.

⁷ For a comparative application of the concept of national Stalinism see Vladimir Tismaneanu, "What Was National Stalinism?" in Dan Stone, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, forthcoming). For an approach on national Stalinism from the point of view of the "historical front" in Romania, see Bogdan Iacob, *Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation. History-Production under Communism in Romania 1955–1966* (Ph.D. dissertation, Central European University, 2011).

and, to a lesser extent, Poland (1960s and early 1970s) and Bulgaria. National Stalinism was a symptom of degeneration. It was narcissistic and anachronistic; it valued uniformity and exploited tribalist resentment and allegiances.

By signaling out the specific historical adaptation amongst various “communisms,” we can understand the extent to, and the ways in which a case such as that of Romanian communism failed to pursue reform, preserving its repressive and totalizing ethos. In the context of the condemnation of the crimes of the communist parties in power after Khrushchev’s secret speech, the process of de-Stalinization implied the prominence of a discourse of socialist legality that led to the establishment of a framework of accountability (though limited) by party leaderships in relation to the citizenry. Toward the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a new resource of legitimization developed: the economic motivation of the population. This is what some researchers have called “welfare dictatorship” (*Fürsorgediktatur*).⁸ It could be argued that, at varying degrees, Leninism’s “domesticization” in the “Aquian phase of the Soviet bloc” (Jowitt) brought about a subversion of party arbitrariness and domination by means of the establishment of a “social(ist) contract,” characterized by co-optation, promotion, limited accountability, segmentary reform, and the limitation of extra-legality. The identitarian discourse underlying this wave of streamlining (adjusted) communism was formulated in minimal terms, as a form of “socialist patriotism” defined as *coexistence* and *acquiescence*. Therefore, one could say that the process of de-radicalization put forth pretensions of “socialist civism” aiming at maintaining social peace.

We argue that, in contrast, national Stalinism, as a blueprint for the construction and transformation of a communist body politic, was based upon a neo-traditional re-conceptualization of the Messianic historical agent. National Stalinism was a complex set of policies, ideological tenets, and social contexts reflecting the party’s commitment to building socialism in a country defined as “a nationalizing nation-

⁸ Konrad H. Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in Konrad H. Jarausch ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Sociocultural History of the GDR*, transl. by Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 47–73.

state.”⁹ It appeared while a single party attempted to construct a national civilization in the aftermath of Sovietization. In other words, we deal with a redefinition of the party’s leading role. The politics of mobilization shifted their focus from class struggle as they began to emphasize a newfound, trans-class, popular solidarity and unity. As David Priestland pointed out, “The unified *narod*, now no longer divided by class, embodied socialism, and was to achieve heroic feats in the struggle against largely external enemies.”¹⁰ In the case of mature Stalinism, this subsequently transformed the USSR itself into “the avant-garde of the international communist movement and the dynamic centre of world politics.”¹¹ Soviet patriotism therefore became an apology for national authenticity, pride, and loyalty. The society was conceived to be founded upon the “moral-political unity” of the people. Such doctrinary monism reloaded produced the Stalinist concept of “popular community”:

It was this community, organized into a state, to which all individuals, all art and all science should dedicate themselves. It was this community that was expected to operate as a self-reliant, more or less closed unit in the world at large. [...] The community of the toilers was no longer pure Marxism. The centrality of the proletariat was lost.¹²

⁹ Brubaker defines a nationalizing nation-state as “the tendency to see the state as an ‘unrealized’ nation-state, as a state destined to be a nation-state, the state of and for a particular nation, but not yet in fact a nation-state (at least not to a sufficient degree); and the concomitant disposition to remedy this perceived defect, to make the state what it is properly and legitimately destined to be, by promoting the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation.” See Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63.

¹⁰ David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization. Ideas, Power, and Terror in Inter-War Russia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249.

¹¹ Erik van Ree, “Stalin as Marxist: The Western roots of Stalin’s Russification of Marxism,” in Sarah Davies and James Harris eds., *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 172.

¹² Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin—A Study in Twentieth-Century Patriotism* (London and New York: Routledge, Curzon, 2002), 189.

The popular community was the new edifying principle of the homogenized nation. It became the foundation of a “thick” notion of membership, based on ideals which required an allegiance to the community as whole, both because of a commitment to the revolutionary, transformative cause, and the ascribed “pre-political commonness of its members” (Ulrich Preuss). The socialist, internationalist, class dependent *Gesellschaft* made way for a country-bound, trans-historical, and patrimonialistic *Gemeinschaft*. The language and politics of the revolution remained in place, but the polity was re-nationalized. Or, as the authors from the Institute for Party History in Romania argued at the beginning of the 1970s:

The process of the nation’s homogenization during socialism is continuously progressing alongside the multilateral development of the society and in the context of preparing the ascension to communism. This consists of an essential altering of the nation’s physiognomy with consequences for its entire existence. Class struggle is substituted with the socio-political and moral-ideological unity of the people.¹³

Following Milovan Djilas, one could contend that national Stalinism is the perpetuation of the “Great Inquisitor” ethics on the basis of which “Stalin killed God (the idealistic purpose of Communism) in order to save the institution (the order of Soviet society).”¹⁴

National Stalinism was a particular form of avoiding the problems incurred by ignoring this original sin of the primary ideological model. It presupposed the rejection of de-radicalization (Khrushchevism), which it replaced/challenged with a creative rethinking of the Stalinist transformist etatization. It was fundamentally characterized by a primordialist discourse of “national authenticity.” It promoted a form of patriotism relying upon a “national Bolshevism” that accepted the progressive role of historical nation-state building and celebrated the role of the individual in history (also part and parcel of the cult of person-

¹³ Ion Ceterchi ed., *Națiunea și contemporaneitatea* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971), 60.

¹⁴ G.R. Urban, ed., *Stalinism—Its Impact on Russia and the World* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1982), 219.

ality). The end result was a “new Stalinist ideology national in form, etatist in content.”¹⁵ Membership in the body social, pioneering the construction of the most advanced polity, was the ultimate basis for personal dignity. The foundation of national Stalinism was a process of transition from historically defining society in accordance to class distinctions, to a synthesis of criteria (social, historical, cultural, biological, etc.) which led to the construction of an identitarian narrative of the “socialist nation” defined by primordialism, ethnocentrism, transformism, protochronism,¹⁶ insulation, and homogenization.

In this context, the distinctive, but not exceptional, nature of the Romanian case within the Eastern European context becomes obvious. The apparent uniqueness and outrageous eccentricity of the Romanian experiment up until its violent demise in December 1989, together with its striking contrast to other communist regimes, should not obscure the preservation of the values, attitudes, and options adopted at the party’s founding congress in May 1921, i.e. political voluntarism, sectarianism, radicalism, cult of hierarchy and authority, scorn for parliamentary democracy, and constitutionalism. To be sure, numerous additional attributes developed and expanded over the years, and there were cleavages, fractures, and turning points in the party’s identity and self-definition. But it is the leading assumption of this approach that in

¹⁵ David Brandenberger and A.M. Dubrovsky, “‘The People Need a Tsar’: the Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931–1941.” *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 5 (1998): 873–92.

¹⁶ The phenomenon of protochronism was conceptualized mainly for literary history and criticism as the identification of developments in Romanian culture that were taken to anticipate events and trends in “greater” Western cultures. However, if we read it in the larger framework of “indigenism,” the phenomenon can be applied to the general Romanian cultural-scientific landscape under communism. The Romanian literary historian Alexandra Tomita correctly stresses that the problem of protochronism should be understood within the bigger picture of communism’s mythologies and the regime’s production and instrumentalization of a collective imaginarium. Or, better said, protochronism was a symptom of the vision of the world, of history, of man, and of the future crystallized during communism in Romania. See Alexandra Tomiță, *O istorie “glorioasă.” Dosarul protocronismului românesc* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2007), along with Verdery, *National Ideology*, and Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2001).

Romania, whether under Gheorghiu-Dej or Ceaușescu, the legacy of radical Stalinism was never thoroughly questioned—and could therefore not be abandoned.¹⁷

Just like in the case of the USSR, starting in the mid-1930s with a radicalization in the aftermath of the victory in “the Great Patriotic War,”¹⁸ when the Soviet state and the Russian core became under Stalin the foremost agents of socio-economic progress in the world, in Romania the communist party triggered a dizzying upward spiral of political, economic, and cultural struggle for Romanians’ preeminence within the country and on the world stage. The declared achievement of the latter was taken as proof for the successful modernity project of Romanian communism. Ultimately, “the expressive appreciation of the nation”¹⁹ in the country was a mechanism of revitalization, of reviving the party’s heroic mission.

III. The Socialist Nation in Ceaușescu’s Romania

The model of national Stalinism was the project of building socialism in one country. The paradigmatic document for the Romanian Communist Party’s identitarian discourse was the 1974 Political Program of the RCP, adopted at the XIth Congress. One author judiciously called it “the official document that put forward the overall strategy of the party to establish a ‘multilaterally developed socialist society’ [i.e., MDSS] and ‘advance towards communism,’” while at the same time functioning as a blueprint for “Ceaușescu’s idea of

¹⁷ Peter Wagner similarly rejected the idea of a *Sonderweg* under communism in Romania because of Ceaușescu’s leadership: “What is most important is that the principal features of Romania’s Stalinist political culture were not decisively changed by Ceaușescu.” F. Peter Wagner, “*Sonderweg* Romania,” in Henry F. Carey, ed., *Romania since 1989*, with a Foreword by Norman Manea (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 42.

¹⁸ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism—Stalinist Mass and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs*, 273.

a homogeneous ‘socialist’ nation.”²⁰ The Program’s introduction was an extensive description of the evolution of the Romanian nation through the filters of scientific socialism, while taking into account interpretative traditions of pre-communist historiography. The main characteristic of the employed historical narrative was the symbol of the Nation as a “sorting device” (Hobsbawm). It was a landmark moment in the regime’s attempt to produce legitimization by *re-sorting* national history. It was a document that officially signaled the merger of the “planned revolution” with an “official nationalism,”²¹ thus becoming the manifesto of national Stalinism in Romania. It officialized the *physiognomy* (profile) of the Romanian nation as imagined by the Party-State.

In all, the Program expressed the rationale of the national Stalinist ideology, for it was meant to “secure the raising of the political and ideological level of the Party, of all the working people around the Romanian Communist Party in the struggle for the implementation of the grand ideals of socialism and communism.”²² It rendered the nationhood-ness of the RCP visible²³ through the projection of its main desiderata into national history and by tailoring the latter according to these very desiderata. The RCP envisaged the Political Program as:

... the first time that the party has worked out a single, long-range program meant to ensure the rallying of the efforts of communists, of the entire people, for the realization of the multilaterally developed socialist society and Romania’s advance toward communism. *This program maps out the fundamental directions of the Party’s activities for a period of 20 to 25 years.*²⁴

²⁰ Dragoș Petrescu, “Building the Nation, Instrumentalizing Nationalism: Revisiting Romanian National-Communism, 1956–1989,” *Nationalities Papers* vol. 37, no. 4 (2009): 523–44, esp. 534.

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991).

²² Nicolae Ceaușescu, *The Romanian Communist Party Program of 1974* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1976), 13.

²³ Katherine Verdery, “Whither ‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism?’” in Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1996), 230.

²⁴ N. Ceaușescu, *The Romanian Communist Party*, 27–28.

The main units of measurement between the new stages of the national development toward communism, “the most righteous social system” as the Political Program called it, were the struggles for national and social liberation and class struggle. Hence, Romanian history became a history of “continuous class struggle[s], of battles fought by the people for liberty and social justice, for safeguarding the national being and independence, for progress and civilization. From the very emergence of the first Romanian State formations, the struggles of the masses against feudal exploitation were closely interlinked with the struggles against foreign domination.”²⁵ The two general ideas behind the Political Program’s conception of nationhood were (1) that the nation was an evergreen reality; and (2) that the creative efforts of the Romanian people forming the nation finally found accomplishment under socialism and the leadership of the Communist Party.²⁶

The socialist nation was the result of the hybridization between nationalism and Leninism. On the one hand, the RCP pursued its socialist modernization project, the MDSS, up to the point of paroxysm. It restlessly sought for the creation of a New Man and of

²⁵ N. Ceaușescu, *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁶ The accomplishment of the historical national efforts of the masses by the RCP was branded as a historical mission of the leadership “of the Romanian people on the path of building the multilaterally developed socialist society and of Communism in Romania,” in Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Ibid.*, 26. Dragoș and Cristina Petrescu identified “four sacred themes of national Communist historiography” in this fundamental document of Romanian communism: “(1) the ancient roots of the Romanian people; (2) the continuity of the Romanians on the actual territory of the country from ancient times to the present; (3) the unity of the Romanian people throughout its entire history; and (4) Romanians’ continuous struggle for independence.” See Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, “Mastering vs. Coming to Terms with the Past: A Critical Analysis of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography,” in Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi and Péter Apor, eds., *Narratives Unbound Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2007), 317. However, one must also note that the Program was a synthetic summary of *all* features of Romanian historiography as they developed within the specific ideological circumstances of the persistent Stalinism of the communist regime. It did not bring anything new, but it was a symbolic compendium of the life and role of nationalism and Stalinism in the political discourse of the Romanian Communist Party.

socialist consciousness. Ceaușescu empathically stated in 1971, signaling the ideological commitment of the regime to revolutionizing the whole people, that:

Our main priority is the multilateral development of the forces of production, of industry, agriculture, and other branches of material goods production, and this is based on the Marxist-Leninist thesis that the development of the forces of production is the essential factor of any society's progress, especially of the socialist society, and consequently of the creation of the conditions for forging Communism.²⁷

On the other hand, the RCP appropriated, recycled, and transposed various types of nation-building discourses and projects from pre-communist times.

In the Romanian case, modernization attempts at overcoming backwardness and creating culturedness were interpreted and implemented by means of scientific socialism, but in accordance to already existing national desiderata and represented in a nationalistic key. As such, communism and nationalism were means to each other's ends.

The socialist nation was "the type of national community characterized by the socio-political and moral-ideological cohesion of its members created by a socialist economy, a homogeneous social structure expressed by the alliance of all classes and social categories under the leadership of the working-class and of its party." This new breed of national community was endowed with "a socialist culture and consciousness based upon the dialectic materialist *conception* and with its own independent and sovereign state."²⁸ Moreover, the nation itself, if it was historicized, was fundamentally dialectic. The here-and-now nation ("socialist nation") was the result of the *longue durée* historical development of the Romanian nation.

State socialism therefore became not only the stage on which "all democratic elements of national history merge" (Lenin), but mainly

²⁷ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Propuneri de masuri pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid, a tuturor oamenilor muncii* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971), 6–9 July 1971, 34.

²⁸ Ion Ceterchi, ed., *Națiunea*, 66.

the time when the entire historical experience of the national community was ascertained. The resultant identity narrative imposed a unity of purpose projected onto a continuous, holistic time (Walter Benjamin's "empty homogenous time").

The phenomenon of re-enchantment with the national past became the legitimating discursive bedrock of the communist regime. First, it created a historical continuum in which state socialism was teleologically inserted as the final option of modernity. Second, it encoded the communist party in Romania's modern and contemporary history, offering broad legitimizing models to fall back to for an organization obsessed with its genealogy.

Socialist patriotism was subsequently defined as "the unifying substance between the party and the people, the cement of our socialist nation's cohesion."²⁹ It expressed the organic unity between the party and society by laying the ground for edifying a new Romania. The body politic attained indeed a new physiognomy: it transformed into what Robert C. Tucker has labeled, in the case of the USSR, a *Siegfried nation*: a utopian re-imagination of community, whose self-purifying mission for permanent progress is constantly blessed and validated by the consciousness of its ancestors' dramatic legacy. The RCP and its Leader now led a Revolution which was on a march to the end of history and which brought to final fruition all the best that was in the past.³⁰ For example, when the party leadership was faced with the problem of mass emigration to Hungary, Ceaușescu had to say the following:

The whole people and especially the youth must be fully aware of the fact that for more than 2000 years our forerunners, the most enlightened men, the people itself – the real history makers – have waged hard battles and made many sacrifices, but have always borne in mind the past, the present as well as the future of the people, of our country, have done their utmost and even laid down their lives to secure a bright future for our nation [...]

²⁹ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Cuvîntare la întîlnirea cu oamenii de artă și cultură* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971), 10 February 1971, 14–16.

³⁰ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power—The Revolution from Above 1928–1941* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 63.

the broad masses never thought of deserting the land where they were born, where their ancestors lived and where our descendants should live forever.³¹

National Stalinism in Romania was founded upon the *territorialization* of the social and political utopia incumbent in the program of building socialism in one country. To take the point further, this ideological construct was the result of the adaptation to a national context of the eschatological presupposition that was the nucleus of Stalinism. The latter was a project of transforming human nature, marked by keywords such as *remaking*, *re-forging*, or *remolding*, which indicator of authenticity was a system of socialist ethics and aesthetics founded upon the permanent accomplishment of one's work in a society regulated by the state. It was concerned with *sculpting* and *gardening* (to use Zygmunt Bauman's evocative terms) a better, purer society while simultaneously molding its human material into a more emancipated, conscious, and superior individual—"the new man."³²

In Romania, this original ethos of, and obsession with, radical social engineering never waned. The nation was an organism building upon itself, continuously expanding to fully grasp its historical mission. The socialist nation was an entity of action, of permanent struggle, and existence in it automatically committed the individual to developmental tasks, as s/he was meant to rise to the expectations of her/his forerunners and descendants. Consequently, being a Romanian became an identity pattern conditioned by the readiness of consuming one's energy for the sake of a historical mission, the embodiment of which was the RCP, incarnated by Nicolae Ceaușescu.

The RCP imposed the Nation as a "master symbol" and made it the essence of its relevant structures, thus forcing all individuals into a national scope of activity. Failures of performance or deviations from

³¹ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposé on the political, ideological, cultural, and educational activity, of molding the new man, conscious and devoted builder of the multilaterally developed socialist society and of communism in Romania* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1989), October 26, 1989, 16.

³² Peter Holquist, "'Information is the Alpha and Omega of our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context," *The Journal of Modern History* vol. 69, no. 3 (Sep. 1997): 415–50.

the party line became evasions of one's patriotic duty. Active, productive, and efficient work was imposed as the only type of activity acceptable in the MDSS. The individual's purpose in life could be revealed only through education, propaganda, and labor:

The formation of the new man can only be the result of participation into active work of society's development. In the socialist and communist system each citizen must perform a useful activity for itself and for all the other members of society, to actively participate, along the lines of the country's unitary development, in productive work, according to one's own specialization and requirements of social progress. No valid citizen can live in socialist society without usefully working for its advance!³³

National Stalinism must therefore be perceived not only from the point of view of self-determination—the right for implementing this specific type of civilization within a local context—but also by means of understanding the ways in which the individual—the object and subject of radical transformation – was defined. Starting with the 1960s, the socialist citizen in Romania became an agent fulfilling the salvational potential of history. S/he contributed to “the continuous flourishing of the socialist society, at the elevation of the Romanian people's life to the greatest heights of civilization.” At the same time, the party took on the duty to embody “the will and aspirations of freedom and independence of the masses” and “to unite all the national forces with the purpose of capitalizing the country's human and material potential.”³⁴

Subsequently, national Stalinism became the ideological medium through which citizens were molded into “historical agents who understood the laws of history and acted on their behalf. Hence, the orientation toward individual ‘consciousness,’ their ‘souls,’ as the decisive

³³ The collected volume of party documents *Formarea și dezvoltarea conștiinței socialiste (Culegere sintetică)* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1978), 103.

³⁴ “Expunerea tov. Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretar general al CC al PCR la adunarea festivă cu prilejul aniversării a 45 de ani de la crearea Partidului Comunist Român,” 7 May, ANIC, fond CC al PCR—Secția de Propagandă și Agitație, 29/1966, f. 68 and f. 70.

realm in which the new man became manifest.”³⁵ The fundamental change undergone by the communist regime in Romania, since the end of the 1950s, was that the voluntaristic anthropological ideal of the Stalinist state increasingly manifested itself by reference to a national mission. The basic unit of human behavior was not merely the socialist citizen, but it gradually evolved into Romanians consciously constructing socialism. This Romanian consciousness was designated as the locus of a trans-historical understanding of the conditionings implied by the nation’s uninterrupted progress toward the end of history.

In conclusion, the socialist nation was the creation of a process of reformed homogenization. The policies of Ceaușescu’s regime fully exemplify this biologically and economically utilitarian vision of the individual and his/her community. It suffices to enumerate some of these policies (as it is not the purpose of the present paper to present a detailed account of them): for example, law no. 14/1972 regarding the organization of the RSR national defense, which argued for the military doctrine of the entire people’s war; the territorial and administrative reorganization of the country in 1968 that became the background against which both the national strategy of socialist industrialization and the systematization of urban and rural areas would be developed (what at the time came to be called the ‘New Agrarian Revolution’); or the program for scientific alimentation of the population (first publicly discussed in 1982), the expression of Ceaușescu’s vision of the people’s welfare by means of administering their “health and strength to work.” Further examples include the 1966 decrees (nos. 770 and 771), banning abortion and the whole complex of pro-natalist policies of the regime, which are an extreme example of biopolitics. One should not forget the post-1977 policies of total re-imagination of human habitat (both public and private), from laws ordering the amount of living space allotted to an apartment building to the Pharaohnic Victory of the Socialism project. Ceaușescu’s statement three weeks after the 1977 earthquake was disturbingly symptomatic: “If we will demolish everything, Bucharest will be a beau-

³⁵ Peter Fritzsche and Jochen Hellbeck, “The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany,” in Geyer and Fitzpatrick, eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 302–341, esp. 314.

tiful city.” Another example that speaks volumes about the regime’s utopian ethos was decree no. 225/1977, which disbanded half of the country’s penitentiaries. The principle underlying this decision was the idea that detainees could better be reeducated by state institutions and mass and communal organizations. Also, one could point to law no. 24/1976, which instructed every person able to work to come before local authorities in order to be allocated into production. Prior to this, there was decree no. 153/1970, which criminalized breaches of social coexistence. To complete the picture, law no. 25 criminalized “social parasitism.”³⁶ All these examples reveal that the ultimate aim of the policies of Ceaușescu’s regime remained the fulfillment of the communist utopia in Romania.

In contrast to the Soviet case, in Romania the nation came back because the RWP/RCP re-invented itself primarily under the circumstance of an encirclement of competing visions of socialist construction and sovereignty. First, the nation re-enforced the communist regime’s insulation from change within the Soviet bloc and the world communist movement. Only later, by way of cumulative implementation of Stalinist modernization, did the RCP reach a discourse of autarchy based on a full vision of international encirclement, both from the East and the West. In the last analysis, it could be argued that the nation was employed within the Romanian communist polity as *differentia specifica* in order to justify the continuous advocacy of individuality and exceptionalism.

³⁶ For details about these laws, decrees, and policies, see among others Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Vladimir Tismaneanu, et al., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România—Raport Final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007); Manuela Marin, *Originea și evoluția cultului personalității lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965–1989* (Alba Iulia: Altip, 2008); Ruxandra Ivan, ed., *Transformarea socialistă. Politici ale regimului communist între ideologie și administrație* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2009); Corina Doboș, Luciana M. Jinga, and Florin S. Soare, *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu. O perspectivă comparativă* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2010). For a fascinating study of the impact of the Stalinist civilizational project on the Romanian family’s everyday life, see Jill Massino, “Something Old, Something New: Marital Roles and Relations in State Socialist Romania,” *Journal of Women’s History* vol. 22, no. 1 (2010): 34–60.

IV. The Cult of Personality and Dynastic Socialism

As mentioned earlier, the socialist nation was epitomized by the Party, which was consistently nationalized both in discourse and personnel practices. While these trends started under Gheorghiu-Dej (especially after 1958), they became the underpinnings of the Ceaușescu regime. But what was the unifying mechanism of the process of socialist nation-state building?³⁷ Retroactively, there is only one possible answer: Nicolae Ceaușescu's cult of personality. The Great Helmsman, the Danube of Thought, the Genius of the Carpathians, the "Hero Among Heroes," the bravest figure in Romania's two-millennia history, the embodiment of the people's creative virtues, the *Conducatorul* was the embodiment of "the will of the entire party and nation." By celebrating the unity between Leader, Party, and Nation, the propaganda aimed to build up the Romanian equivalent of the Nazi *heroisch-völkisch Gemeinschaft*. The most played song on Romanian TV and radio, in fact an unofficial anthem, was lionizing the triadic formula "Partidul, Ceaușescu, Romania," deliberately brought together to coincide as an acronym with that of the ruling party (PCR). Simply put, the Romanian ideology under Ceaușescu could be summed up in one incantation: "One Leader, One Party, One Nation."

Several authors have identified a number of Ceaușescu's "mystical avatars": the young revolutionary, the architect of contemporary Romania, the great Marxist-Leninist theoretician, the son *and* father of the nation, the champion *and* hero of world peace, and the guarantor of national unity and independence.³⁸ The cult of Ceaușescu rested from the start on the presumed continuity of a heroic and consistently autonomous nucleus in the party. The embarrassing

³⁷ David Brandenberger, "Stalin as Symbol: A Case Study of the Personality Cult and its Construction," in Davies and Harris, eds., *Stalin: A New History*, 249–70, esp. 250.

³⁸ See Manuela Marin, *Originea și evoluția*, Andrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx—o introducere în istoria comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005), and Angelo Mitchievici, "Biografia unei secunde: 4 martie 1977 și Mitul Marelui Arhitect—Nicolae Ceaușescu, eroul fondator," in Ruxandra Cesereanu, ed., *Comunism și represiune în România. Istoria tematică a unui fratricid național* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2006), 234–50.

moments in the party's history were conveniently ignored. Only in 1966, on the 45th anniversary of the foundation of the Communist Party of Romania, did Ceaușescu touch on these issues, insisting more or less explicitly on the fact that all the essential errors in the underground communist strategy had arisen first and foremost from the fact that there were many individuals from other ethnic groups in the leadership of the party.³⁹

By the Thirteenth Congress of the RCP (1984), there was no one left in the party who could challenge or correct the policies of Romania's ruling family. Quite logically, the official resolution adopted at the congress accurately mirrored the prevailing political system:

In the comprehensive work of building the new system, the great achievements in the period opened by the Ninth Party Congress are particularly noticeable, achievements which are indestructibly linked to the extensive activity carried out with clear-sightedness and in a profound, creative spirit, with revolutionary devotion and fervent patriotism by Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, party General Secretary and president of the Republic, founder of modern Romania, the national hero who with boundless devotion serves the supreme interests of all our people, and under whose wise leadership the Romanian people have registered the richest accomplishments—in their entire history—in the past 20 years, a period that had definitely entered our nation's awareness as the 'Ceaușescu era.'⁴⁰

In this section we will dwell neither on the specific dynamics that led to the institutionalization of Ceaușescu's cult, nor on its discursive and thematic specificities. What we wish to emphasize here is the fundamental differentiation between Nicolae Ceaușescu's cult and the original model, that is, the cult of Stalin. In our reading, what sets the two

³⁹ "Expunerea tov. Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretar general al CC al PCR la adunarea festivă cu prilejul aniversării a 45 de ani de la crearea Partidului Comunist Român," 7 May, ANIC, fond CC al PCR—Secția de Propagandă și Agitație, 29/1966, ff. 1-89.

⁴⁰ FBIS, *Eastern Europe* (November 29, 1984), H/4.

apart is what Ken Jowitt has called the *familialization* of the party, or, to use our coinage, its branching into dynastic communism.⁴¹

Both in Mussolini's Italy and Stalin's Russia, the Leader's myth was not in itself the rationale of the secularization of politics. In Emilio Gentile's words, "It was created out of the collective experience of a movement that considered itself invested with a missionary charisma of its own, one that was in fact not, in its beginnings."⁴² Both Il Duce and the Party General Secretary were Leader institutions existing independently of a certain individual. This "totalitarian Caesarism" (Gentile) allowed for the interchangeability of charisma between the Leader and the Party. The primary form of charisma, especially in the Soviet case, was that of the party as scientific socialism incarnate, the eschatological agent bridging "the gap between the proletariat 'in itself' and the proletariat *'for itself'*."⁴³ In other words, to use Jowitt's famous formula, Leninism was based upon charismatic impersonalism. According to Erik van Ree, "Stalin definitely set out to establish his undivided personal power, but he remained sufficiently trapped in the Leninist party ideology to decide that the party's formal structure should remain untouched. Stalin's legitimacy in the eyes of his fellow party leaders rested in what they saw as his role of guarantor of their collective power of the state."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Stalin, by perpetrating crimes *against* the party, did irretrievably subvert the Party's "charisma of reason" (Sigrid Meuschel), in spite (or perhaps because) of the militants' tantalizing efforts to make sense of the universalized terrorist

⁴¹ See the proceedings of the conference published under the title *Romania, A Case of Dynastic Communism* (New York: Freedom House, 1989).

⁴² Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 132–36.

⁴³ Igal Halfin pointedly underlined that "Like Christ, both human and divine, the Party was, at one and the same time, a real institution and an incarnated idea. The formation of the Party was the First Coming; not fully appreciated by an immature working class, it heralded a Second Coming and the apotheosis of workers' consciousness at which point all workers would join the Party, thereby rendering it superfluous." Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light. Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 156–57.

⁴⁴ Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought*, 160.

lunacy.⁴⁵ The bottom line, however, is that both fascism (its Italian avatar) and Leninism had the possibility of charismatic regeneration built in, regardless of the leadership's *persona*. What counted for their true believers was the salvational promise incarnated by the Party—the source of freedom through successful experimentation with history. In contrast, Ian Kershaw's seminal study of the "Hitler myth" showed the Leader as a political entity almost independent of the party, as "the motor for integration, mobilization, and legitimation within the Nazi system of rule."⁴⁶

In Ceaușescu's case, his personality cult was not only a legitimator and an outgrowth of the RCP. It developed a secondary track of symbolic sustenance: the Leader as a bodily expression of the nation's organic and trans-historical existence. His myth was the representation of *the* demiurgic agent of History in both the Marxist-Leninist and National eschatologies. He was the symbol of a unity born out of the *Gleichschaltung* of both citizens and party members. No wonder that the RCP numbered almost 4 million members in 1989, making it, proportionately, one of the largest in the world. Nicolae Ceaușescu's rise to the top of the communist party and his gradual achievement of total power were the result of his actions, of the support he received within the high echelons of the party, of the backing of those that he promoted within his leadership, and, last but not least, of his unquestionable popularity within the population at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s. In the context of the evolution of the domestic communist regime, one could paraphrase Ian Kershaw in saying that, by the mid-1970s, Romania had bound itself to the dictatorship it had created.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ In his interview with George Urban, Adam Ulam describes the process by which moral obligation becomes an epiphenomenon: "Communist propaganda, then as now, managed to get across the message that the distant goals of the Communist system were worth fighting and dying for even if your father was in a forced labor camp and your mother allowed to starve, and even if the immediate tasks you were asked to perform seemed immoral or otherwise objectionable. Your distant objectives justified the means." G.R. Urban, ed., *Stalinism—Its Impact on Russia and the World* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1982), 108.

⁴⁶ Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth.' Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 257.

⁴⁷ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 318–19.

By the late 1970s, surrounded by sycophants and indulging in self-glorious fantasies, Ceaușescu had become a prisoner of his own myth. He was driven by a chain of psycho-emotional identifications to believe that he embodied the Will of History.

However, via this myth, Byzantinism triumphed in Romanian political culture: intrigues, elimination of enemies through behind-the-scene conspiracies, indulgence in double-think and double-talk, demagoguery as a national disease, dismissal of genuine ethical concerns, manipulation and deception—all these repellant features of the Eastern Empire heritage, recaptured and enforced under Stalin, reached a pinnacle in the Ceaușescu personality cult. The members of the party apparatus may have been irritated by this pageantry or the attribution of all historical merit to Ceaușescu himself, but they nevertheless enjoyed the psychological effects of the cult, namely, the cauterization of all critical thought. They only had to obey the Conducator's exhortations blindly, and, as long as they did not offend him, were allowed to keep all (or at least most) of their prerequisites. In this respect, the Romanian regime was only a genre of what has been described as the dictatorship of the *nomenklatura*. An aggravating circumstance was Ceaușescu's belief that what might be called political magic, or ideological shamanism, could replace common sense, that both human will and reality were infinitely flexible, ready to be molded according to his own utopian blueprints.

Stalinism and Byzantinism culminated in a synthesis of exacerbated ambition, megalomaniac tyranny, and apocryphal nationalism. Ceaușescu's cult tried to mix the ingredients mentioned by Fritz Stern in path-breaking analysis of "National Socialism as temptation": miracle, magic, and myth.⁴⁸ As Francois DuBois remarked, Nicolae Ceaușescu, "an incurable Leninist, truly believed that he was doing the right thing in serving communism with unrelenting rigor and strength." He therefore was totally committed to fulfilling what he perceived was his national, revolutionary mission while in power.⁴⁹

The result of this mixture of Byzantine political rites, Stalinist polity construction, and revolutionary para-modern resentful fantasies

⁴⁸ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: National Socialism in the Drama of the German Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

⁴⁹ Pierre DuBois, *Ceaușescu la putere. Ancheta asupra unei ascensiuni politice* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004), 59.

was Ceaușescu's dynastic socialism. His version relied on the scarification of the individual, not only for the benefit of the party, but also for the all-consuming appetite for power of the ruling family. The political emasculation of the group within the party apparatus that supported Ceaușescu's ascension to power coincided with two major processes: (a) Elena Ceaușescu's ascension to the highest party echelons, following the RCP National Conference in 1972; (b) Ceaușescu's increasing reliance upon another group composed primarily of activists directly and personally linked to and promoted by him. New regulations for the functioning of the Party-state apparatus were created (e.g., *rotația cadrelor*—the rotation of cadres, officially introduced in July 1972 at the RCP National Conference), and new criteria for the promotion of cadres were devised to allow the general secretary's wife to reach the second-in-command position within the apparatus (e.g., the creation and the enlargement of the Permanent Bureau and of the Political Executive Committee). In the later stages of his regime, the country was ruled by a coterie within the party elite whose main legitimacy consisted of its total fealty to its patrons, the Ceaușescu family. Moreover, the center was also transformed on the basis of kin relations, which were reflected in leadership positions. It was a system of self-reproducing and escalating patronage. Moreover, the promotion of Ceaușescu's youngest son, Nicu (from the XIIth Congress onwards), indicated the solution for a future crisis of succession. Romania seemed at the time to be governed by a providential trinity, with the father as the supreme leader, the mother as the ever-refreshing source of vitality, and the son as an immaculate incarnation of the future. Francois DuBois again provided an excellent diagnosis of the last stage of Romanian communism: "The lost honor of the Romanian communist party had died a long time ago. [Democratic] Centralism created the dictatorship of the party secretary."⁵⁰ The demise of the regime was caused by the very nature of the system in power.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Du Bois, *Ceaușescu*, 158.

⁵¹ Ian Kershaw's analysis of Hitler's dictatorship can provide an interesting new avenue of interpreting the Romanian case. Kershaw famously argued that in Nazi Germany "governmental disorder and 'cumulative radicalization' were two sides of the same coin." The power and decision-making dynamics in communist Romania increasingly depended on the proximity

The dynastic socialist deviation in Romania's case generated debates about the relevance of the notion of sultanism for Ceaușescu's regime. At first glance, it seems that the arbitrariness and absurdity of the personality cult, the almost theocratic rule, and the phenomenon of generalized paternalism justify such a conceptual label. However, as Peter Siani-Davies demonstrated, despite similar features with sultanistic systems, Ceaușescu's was "closer to totalitarianism."⁵² Overall, however, Ceaușescu's regime followed closely in the footsteps of Stalin: it talked about modernization but practiced neo-traditionalism. The crumbling of communism in Romania was facilitated not only by the loss of self-confidence within the power-elite, but, first and foremost, because of the disenchantment of the ruling caste with the regime's Messianic, national mission. In other words—to use formulas often employed in the discourse of the personality cult, and recently going through a second life in some Romanian newspapers—the communists always believed they were humane (*oameni de omenie*) and patriotic. But when Ceaușescu exhausted and compromised the legitimizing potential of such notions, the Party realized communism could no longer be regenerated or revived.

V. The Odd Revolution: Making Sense of the Leninist Debris

The discussion of the "Ceaușescu myth" takes us to the analysis of post-communist transformation in Romania. The specificities of the RCP General Secretary rule have been instrumentalized by its successors in

to and the relationship with the dictator, as the party's charismatic impersonalism gave way to the personal authority of the supreme leader. The arbitrariness and incoherence of the government increased along with the augmentation of the cult of personality and with the ever-fresher waves of ideological radicalization. See Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–45: Nemesis* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2000), 311–16.

⁵² Peter Siani-Davies, "Revoluția în societățile comuniste și postcomuniste. O agendă de cercetare pentru un studiu comparativ a două cazuri din Balcani: România (1989) și Serbia (2000)," in Bogdan Murgescu, ed., *Revoluția română din Decembrie 1989* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2007), 115–58.

order to perpetuate ambiguity over the state of facts within the communist regime. What we have been experiencing in these twenty years since the fall of communism is a “cumulative theft of agency” (Jeffrey Brooks). More often than not, the communist period has been explained on the basis of a unilateral “concentration of agency in the leader [that] deprived other actors of their accountability for misdeeds.”⁵³ In Romania, accomplishments (perceived, invented, or real) have been claimed aplenty. However, there has been no expiation or accountability for the crimes, abuses, and mis-developments of the communist past.

The apple is rotten at the core. The first decade of Romania’s post-1989 experience presented a striking paradox: the most abrupt break with the old order resulted in the least radical transformation. Some authors have gone as far as stating that the public sphere’s inability to reach a collective memory of the Romanian revolution, and the contradictions in the interpretation of the coming into being of the post-communist order, “revealed and represented a failed break between ‘old’ and ‘new.’”⁵⁴

The Romanian revolution functioned as “a mode of legitimation.”⁵⁵ Its various interpretations, readings, and myths reflected the self-image of the new power centers and societal divisions in the country rather than a coherent understanding. They hardly relied on coherent analyses of the recently defunct communist regime. Under these circumstances, answers to questions related to the wider process of dealing with the totalitarian past, to the legacies of Leninism, and to the conversion of systemic elements from communism into the developing democratic order, had been continuously postponed or remained largely unclarified. For at least fifteen years, Romania was befallen by state-sponsored amnesia.⁵⁶

⁵³ Jeffrey Brooks, “Stalin’s Politics of Obligation,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* vol. 4, no. 1 (June 2003): 167–70.

⁵⁴ John F. Ely and Cătălin Augustin Stoica, “Re-membering Romania,” in Carey, *Romania*, 106.

⁵⁵ Peter Siani-Davis, “The Revolution after the Revolution,” in Duncan Light and David Phinnemore eds., *Post-Communist Romania. Coming to Terms with Transition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 17.

⁵⁶ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Democracy and Memory: Romania Confronts its Communist Past,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* vol. 617, no. 1 (May 2008): 166–80.

From the early moments of the Romanian revolution, it was obvious that “communism” per se was dead as a system of government in Romania. But the party *nomenklatura*—except for the Ceaușescus plus immediate members of their clan and their closest collaborators—were still around and held positions of power which they were not ready to abandon. Once Ceaușescu left the Central Committee building, a vacuum of power was created that was filled by representatives of the disgruntled party apparatus and army backed by the ever-present Securitate. Taking advantage of the total weakening of the party by means of the dictator’s personal rule, the onus of the discourses of de-legitimization instrumentalized by the new group in power (falling under the rather ambiguous umbrella of The National Salvation Front) fell on the Ceaușescus and their inner circle. The regime itself and the communist party were hardly under open attack. By all means, both the party and the regime had lost of their legitimacy, if taking into account their vulnerability to the rise of popular discontent. But Siani-Davies correctly remarked that in 1989 and during the immediate years, “nobody knew how much of the past was no longer acceptable.”⁵⁷ The problem of the possible conversions and legacies from the *ancien régime* remained open-ended, as neither the new leaders nor the population seemed too sure of what would remain of the “old” beyond 1989 after the disappearance of the “ruling family.”

The ambivalence of the December 1989 Revolution consisted in the fact that the birth of pluralism coincided with the anxiety-driven authoritarian regrouping of the *nomenklatura*.⁵⁸ Therefore, we could argue that the revolution went through two stages: the first, heroic and radical, followed by a second, during which the disillusioned forces of the old regime along with political adventurers riding the wave of the times successfully imposed their domination over the fledgling and embryonic structures of post-communist power. The end of

⁵⁷ Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 26.

⁵⁸ Also see Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Decembrie '89. Deconstrucția unei revoluții* (Iași: Polirom, 2004), and Andrei Codrescu, *The Hole in the Flag: A Romanian Exile's Story of Return and Revolution* (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1991).

Ceaușescu's dictatorship was not the direct result of behind-the-scene machinations. Instead, it was the result of a mass revolt that, because of the consequences it provoked, can be considered truly revolutionary. The end of December 1989 was undoubtedly a watershed moment, a historical rupture: the unleashed energies brought about, in the long run, the rebirth of political parties, market economy, freedom of expression, and the resurgence of civil society. Just as much as the other upheavals of 1989, the Romanian revolution was a total social phenomenon, a spontaneous explosion of democracy, a reassertion of liberty against ideocratic despotism.

Unfortunately, Ion Iliescu's "original democracy" was founded upon an unyielding refusal to allow a genuine reshuffling of the elite. His attitude had a deep-seated cause: it related to the official orthodoxy that claimed that once Ceaușescu was ousted and liquidated, communism had ceased to exist and Romania had become a democracy. Little rigorous examination of the communist past occurred after December 1989. Neither Iliescu nor his supporters were ready to engage in an analysis of Romania's Leninist experience. There were too many skeletons in their closets, and they preferred simply to assign the guilt for past aberrations to the defunct dictator and his immediate subordinates. As the old saying goes, *ex nihilo nihil*.

The post-Ceaușescu aftermath included many elements that had been part and parcel of the political style of the communist bureaucracy, including components of the symbolic structure of the old regime's legitimacy, such as (1) a quasi-charismatic party or movement with a leader suspicious of and often hostile to impersonal democratic procedures and regulations; (2) an exaltation of the ethnically homogeneous community (*patrie, neam, natiune*) and an exploitation by some of the hegemonic forces of *völkisch* themes and mythologies; (3) an aversion to, or distrust of, market relations and continuous appeal to "Third Way" formulas; (4) an intense cultivation of collective identities, loyalties, and attachments, combined with a suspicious attitude toward minority rights, aspirations, and grievances; and (5) regime anxiety demonstrated by a strong rhetoric of solidarity that insists on the need for Romanians to close ranks against all alleged foreign conspiracies meant to dismantle their unitary nation-state. Moreover, the legacy of the communist regime in Romania is an outlook of post-communist patrimonialism, which

as far as 2011 still lies at the core of the local political and social environment.⁵⁹

As shown in the previous sections of this article, the entrenchment of the Ceaușescu regime took place by means of the hybridization of nationalism with communism. The system reached its maturity by increasingly becoming more neo-traditional (as shown by organizational corruption and personalism, from the point of view of a re-enchantment with the socio-symbolic capital of procommunist times). This process allowed for the regime to co-opt an increasing number of groups within the society that competed for influence over political actors important in the various sectors of the party-state. Whole sections of the Romanian population participated in the reproduction of the system without any liberalization from the latter's part. Under the circumstances, symbolic resources of Ceaușescu's communism such as Potemkian-like self-representations inevitably survived the shock of 1989 to haunt the collective imaginarius of Romanians. Not surprisingly, only the last years of Ceaușescu's rule were unanimously condemned as a deviation from a putatively promising national path of Romanian socialism. The national Stalinist *Gleichaltung* of the 1960s, the bedrock for the reinvention and reproduction of the regime as a national totalitarian movement, has hardly been considered a part of the past that Romania's post-communist democracy had to overcome. One local analyst's pronouncements on this issue clearly illustrate the conflict between personal memory and the history of communism's evolution in the country:

⁵⁹ Ely and Stoica identified six features of Romanian post-communist patrimonialism that are directly connected to the features of what we called the symbolic structure of the old regime's legitimacy: "(a) a leader unequivocally acknowledged as the top political authority; (b) a leader who retains and funds a staff beholden to him alone as well as a coercive apparatus beholden to him personally; (c) creating a regime where the line between public and private property, and between private and state action, is blurred in favor of the ruler and his clients, such that (d) much of society responds by organizing itself, in large part, along similar patron-client lines in the competition for state resources, power, and prestige; (e) the need to administer a huge state bureaucracy, often collectively inefficient and divided among competing patron-client chains, and (f) the promotion of charismatic elements from Communist days." See Ely and Stoica, "Re-Membering Romania," 118–19.

In the sixties, we did not feel that the national idea was an ideology. On the contrary, we considered it a non-ideology *if not even a counter-ideology* [our emphasis]. In any case, we perceived it as a liberation from the weight of the communist ideology's terror. In the eighties, the national ideal was transformed into an ideology, meaning that, on the one hand, it was employed in the service of official politics, and, on the other hand, it became nationalism in the theory and praxis of the group that played on the party's tune.⁶⁰

Indeed, the fantasies of salvation⁶¹ on the basis of which the Romanian Communist Party and its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, discovered their national mission in tune with large sections of the Romanian population⁶² were transposed in post-communism. In this context, Lucian Boia's remark now hardly seems surprising: as far as national mythology was concerned, "*official discourse* (especially detectable in the frequent historical evocations on official television as well as in school textbooks) continues, and sometimes even amplifies the fundamental elements of pre-revolutionary discourse."⁶³ In the first two

⁶⁰ Mircea Martin, "Cultura română între comunism și naționalism" (IV) [Intellectualii ca 'reproducători' ai ideologiei naționale], *Revista* 22 vol. 665, no. 49 (December 2002): 3–9.

⁶¹ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁶² For example, one historian, I. D. Suci, who had been imprisoned in the first years of the regime for his anti-communist views, provided a characterization, in October 1968, that basically welded Ceaușescu's image onto the historical destiny of the Romanian nation: "Ceaușescu's accession is, historically speaking (beyond matters such as Marxism and current social and political problems), a phenomenon of resistance before the danger of our obliteration as a nation. Those who criticize him or gossip about trifles (he doesn't do this or that) are simply meek for they don't understand the historical sign of our days." Such declarations, merging national salvationism with the destiny of the communist polity and its leadership, could be found in many quarters of Romanian society at the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. See Ioan Opriș, *Istoricii și Securitatea*, vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2007), 424.

⁶³ Boia, *History and Myth*, 228–29. When Boia's book was first published in Romania in 1998, it provoked a hail of fervent protests and vehement rejections. Many at the time, coming from all sectors of public opinion, claimed

decades after 1989, nationalism functioned as the common denominator of Romanian politics, a minimal threshold for politicians and parties unable to communicate effectively and differently with their electoral bases.⁶⁴

Ultimately, national Stalinism in Romania seems to have left at least three types of legacies: (1) a patrimonialism exacerbated by the legacy of dynastic socialism; (2) a collective imaginarius imprinted by the RCP's nationalization of the masses or re-imagination of the national community; and (3) the social utopia of civilization incumbent in communism's illiberal modernity. More than twenty years after 1989, many of the malaises, frustrations, and insecurities presupposed by such a legacy have yet to be fully tackled by Romanian society. Even in the aftermath of the condemnation of the communist regime as illegitimate and criminal in December 2006, discussions about the idiosyncrasies and paradoxes of communism's heritage are rather mute, stemming from public discomfort or even disinterest. One watershed event remains: the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (the document on the basis of which the regime was condemned) unambiguously pointed to the systemic reproduction by way of hybridization of organic, ethnocentric nationalism with Marxist-Leninist tenets.⁶⁵ This could be a turning point for the re-assessment and re-visiting of the communist historical experience in Romania, the first step to drawing a demarcation line between the past, its histories, and our memories of it.

that the historian had dishonored and distorted the history of the Romanian nation. It was the typical reaction of a political and cultural establishment functioning on the borrowed time by the myths, illusions, and propaganda from the communist period.

⁶⁴ Tom Gallagher, "Nationalism and Romanian Political Culture in 1990s" in Light and Phinnemore, eds., *Post-Communist Romania*, 114. See also Tom Gallagher, *Romania after Ceaușescu: The Politics of Intolerance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995). Veljko Vujacic went as far as identifying a phenomenon which he labeled "postcommunist national socialism" that "appears as the last rearguard action of the *nomenklatura* against the demise of real, really existing socialism and its dissolution into the Western-dominated 'bourgeois-cosmopolitan' order." See Veljko Vujacic, "From Class to Nation: Left, Right, and the Ideological and Institutional Roots of Post-Communist 'National Socialism'," *East European Politics and Societies* vol. 17 (2003): 388.

⁶⁵ For example Vladimir Tismaneanu, et al., *Raport Final*, 32 and 767.

NICK MILLER

Where Was the Serbian Havel?

My focus in this article will be on Serbia's intellectuals in the 1980s. Why in their work did they diverge from patterns established in Eastern Europe's northern tier? Why did Serbia not produce influential intellectual leaders who embraced the universal, humane, and tolerant qualities we tend to attribute to the revolutions and intellectuals of Europe's 1989? The answer to that question will have implications for others that are beyond the scope of my paper today but are still interesting: Why was there no velvet revolution there? Was this uniqueness "Serbian," or can it be understood more broadly as a Southeastern European phenomenon?¹ There are more than a few assumptions incorporated into these questions—after all, it is possible that Serbia did produce humane and tolerant intellectuals in the 1980s, and it is even worth arguing that it produced some who became influential leaders; it is also possible to argue that 1989 was revolutionary for Serbia. It is even possible that Serbia was unexceptional in the context of the transition from communism, and that Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary were the extraordinary exceptions to the more mundane rule established elsewhere in the

¹ Jacques Rupnik wrote an article ten years ago on the question of Southeastern Europe's exceptional experiences in 1989. It is titled "On Two Models of Exit from Communism: Central Europe and the Balkans" and appeared in a volume on the tenth anniversary of the events, Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2000), 14–24. He offers up several possible explanations for the differences for discussion, but does not commit to one or the other.

region.² The simple fact that Serbian intellectuals saw themselves as part of a broader movement for human rights exemplified by groups like KOR and Charter '77 compels us to examine the question more closely.³

1989 produced some magical phrases and pictures: East German tourists fleeing the bloc by way of Hungary; roundtable discussions, theaters, actors, and poets, helpful border guards, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and a "Velvet Revolution" all remain as powerful memories of peaceful change that few at the time imagined could or would occur. Of course we know that there were exceptions, but even in Romania, where images of the dead Ceaușescu were immediately beamed over the world media on Christmas, the outcome was the end of a despised regime, and this anyway was a good thing.

These revolutions produced an impressive list of heroic figures, especially those humanistic intellectuals who escorted the old regime to the graveyard. They could be characterized, as Václav Havel and Adam Michnik were by Vladimir Tismaneanu, as "paragons of dignity within a morass of cynicism, duplicity, and conformity."⁴ They developed forms of opposition to the regimes that were built on the notion that individual dignity, the individual's ability to live honestly ("in truth," as Havel put it), could bring liberty even as the totalitarian regimes retained power. This totalitarianism demanded complicity, and Havel wished Czechs and Slovaks to withhold this complicity. I do not think I need to belabor this point—we still celebrate the beauty of the ideas of "living in truth," the "parallel polis," and "antipolitics," all of which emphasized the universality of human rights and living an authentic life amid the lies that defined totalitarian regimes. Havel, in particular, emerged from the Velvet Revolution as (or at least considered

² Was Serbia exceptional? For some reflections on this question, see Veljko Vujačić, "Reexamining the 'Serbian Exceptionalism' Thesis" (Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Working Papers Series, 2004) (last accessed Nov. 2, 2009 at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1mg8f31q>). Vujačić criticizes an earlier essay of mine in his article.

³ Dobrica Ćosić compares his work with that of KOR, as will be examined later in this paper.

⁴ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Fighting for the Public Sphere: Democratic Intellectuals under Postcommunism," in Antohi and Tismaneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future*, 156.

to be) a “moral leader of the democratic world” on par with Nelson Mandela.⁵ Others played a parallel role to Havel in their own environments, with less international acclaim but no less merit. I think it would be safe to say that one of the narratives to emerge from the 1989 revolutions is that intellectuals like Havel were at least partially responsible for the velvet nature of the revolutions.⁶

Yugoslavia, and thus Serbia, had virtually no place in this narrative.⁷ There was certainly no velvet revolution in 1989 in Yugoslavia. Still, Serbia did have a couple of coherent and influential pockets of intellectual opposition to the regime—one, dominant earlier in the postwar period, was Marxist humanist; the other, which developed over time from the 1970s, moved from the principled defense of the freedom of expression to a clearly nationalist orientation. I will provide my explanation for the fact that the nationalist opposition almost completely swamped the Marxist one by 1989 as this paper progresses.

One particular intellectual emerged in the 1980s with the moral authority, potential popularity, rhetorical skills, and even much of the phraseology of Václav Havel. His name is Dobrica Ćosić, and he is often described as one of Serbia’s greatest novelists. If one sat down to read some of the essays and speeches of Havel and Ćosić, one could be forgiven for thinking the two of them really were kindred spirits. They both sought the “Truth,” they both argued that they and their peoples were responsible for their own moral and material dilemmas, they both argued that the essential humanity of their peoples needed to be on display during the crises they endured. They shared much, at least in form. As for Yugoslavia as a whole, I suppose there were some limited parallels. But, after several decades enjoying a reputation as one of the “good” communist states (if not the only one), one with open

⁵ John Keane, *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 3.

⁶ There is now a large literature on 1989; within it, once can find a variety of fairly reductive arguments regarding who or what was responsible for the revolutions. Timothy Garton Ash makes the point that there are many valid entry points for an examination of 1989, in his very recent review essay “1989!” in *The New York Review of Books* vol. 56, no. 17 (November 5, 2009): 4–8.

⁷ Yugoslavia’s “transition” is still best described, in my view, in Laura Silber and Alan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (London: Penguin, 1997).

borders, a relatively high standard of living, and a regular stream of visitors to the west (including its own critics), nothing that happened in 1989 in Yugoslavia fit the storyline established elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Plenty did happen in 1989 in Serbia and Yugoslavia—political parties formed, the likelihood of free elections became more apparent, outdoor speeches were delivered to millions at a time, some sort of transition was occurring, and intellectuals, including Ćosić and many others, acted out a role parallel to that of Havel, or Michnik, or the others from the northern tier. But there was no end of communism, no transition, and there were most definitely no examples of the principled universalism exemplified by the northern tier movements. Where Václav Havel is remembered as a Czech Nelson Mandela, and Czechoslovakia had a Velvet Revolution, Dobrica Ćosić is more often remembered as a virulent nationalist who helped make possible the violent wars that destroyed Yugoslavia and hundreds of thousands of lives.⁸ Why did the Serbian experience differ so greatly from that of its northern neighbors?

Serbia's Intellectual Opposition to the Yugoslav Regime

I would like to leave aside for the moment the possibility that such a characterization of Serbian intellectual leaders—that the Serbian opposition to communism lacked the humanist/universalist foundation of that of its northern neighbors—is unfair. For now, let us explore the commonalities and differences between the Serbian and East Central European varieties of opposition to communism. First off, we can say that their long-term trajectories were similar. That trajectory has been well-documented. First came attempts to reform, multiple attempts in some countries. Thus we see in Hungary, for instance, initial attempts to de-Stalinize as attempts to create a better socialism. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, a similar progress has been traced: when opponents of the regimes spoke out, it was initially to seek a reformed, purer version of socialism. The response to the failure of such movements

⁸ I argue along these lines in Nick Miller, *The Nonconformists: Culture, Politics, and Nationalism in a Serbian Intellectual Circle, 1944–1991* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2007).

was to reject socialism in all its variants. In place of reform we see the development of the various inspirational approaches that include Charter '77 and KOR. This process happened famously in Poland and Czechoslovakia, but also in Serbia.

Given the similar trajectories, one way of explaining the differing outcomes would be to ask what provoked opposition to communism in the various cases. The failures that prompted the birth of KOR and Charter '77 were universal—the failures of those regimes to meet basic human needs and to protect human rights in their countries. They and other groups like them engaged in a struggle to create a so-called civil society alongside or under the noses of the regimes. Whether it was the failures of the Polish regime to assure basic material and spiritual needs, or the Czechoslovak government's policies of normalization, the intellectual leaders that emerged in those states emphasized the universality of their demands. Most Serbian intellectuals did not follow the same muse of universality, perhaps because the conditions of their existence did not allow them the luxury of doing so.

The context for the growth of Serbian dissent is a Yugoslavia that underwent significant administrative and economic reform in the 1960s and early 1970s.⁹ We need to know: That one of the Tito regime's most fundamental promises to the Yugoslav peoples was to nurture their "brotherhood and unity." That through the 1950s the Tito regime had chosen to pursue brotherhood and unity via centralized policies that envisioned the end of classes and nations in Yugoslavia—standard communist boilerplate, in other words, that was, one supposes, bound to fail. The response to the failure of such centralization of the economy was, by the early 1960s, the decision to allow republics in Yugoslavia to have a degree of control over their economic fates. As was the case elsewhere in the communist bloc, limited political reform followed economic reforms. The trend in Yugoslavia was to enhance rather than diminish republican autonomy, and thus the end of the fantasy that economic equality would lead to the death of national identity. Serbs,

⁹ On this period in Yugoslav history, see Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948–1974* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) and Steven Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion in Socialist Yugoslavia: Political Decision-Making since 1966* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

as the group most dispersed throughout Yugoslavia, were the ones who held out the most hope for the original vision of an end to nations in Yugoslavia, no matter how fantastic such a goal may have been.¹⁰

A brief history of Serbian dissent shows that the first hint of Serbian unhappiness in Yugoslavia emerged in 1966, with the fall from grace of Aleksandar Ranković. The reason for the purge of Ranković was likely that he either symbolically or actually stood in the way of economic and administrative reforms that Tito wished to implement. The reason for any Serbian unhappiness was not that Ranković had been a particularly loveable figure, or a supporter of more openness in society, or of economic reform; instead, Ranković was the opposite of all of these—a taciturn security chief who had kept tabs on cultural life in Yugoslavia, and an opponent of economic reform. The reason his fall irked many Serbs was that Ranković was known as a supporter of Serbian causes at the apex of power in Yugoslavia. Although it might not have been totally clear at the time, his perceived role as the protector of Serbian interests in Kosovo was paramount. Dobrica Ćosić, then a member in good standing of the League of Communists of Serbia, wrote a letter to Tito defending Ranković.¹¹ Try to imagine Václav Havel or Adam Michnik rising to the defense of the Czech or Polish security chiefs, and you have an idea of the disconnect at the outset of a Serbian opposition. That many influential Serbian communists and non-communists were left muttering about the loss of the Serbs' protector was no secret, then or later.

The pattern was set—once Ranković fell, any events that could be conceptualized as anti-Serbian were—and suspicious Serbs (still a quite small number) had their culprit in the regime, which had purged him. The same decentralizing administrative and economic reforms that prompted the removal of Ranković also empowered many of Yugoslavia's national groups. In 1967, a Croatian national movement made its presence felt; in 1968, the first open Albanian rebellion against Yugoslav rule occurred in Kosovo. Serbs, as the only people in Yugoslavia who were dispersed through all of its republics and provinces, could not share the

¹⁰ See Nick Miller, "The Nonconformists: Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović Envision Serbia," in *Slavic Review* vol. 58, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 515–36, which discusses this question in some detail.

¹¹ Miller, *The Nonconformists*, 110.

others' enthusiasm for decentralization. Thereafter, on several occasions, Serbian intellectuals and politicians who openly or even circumspectly criticized these developments were labeled nationalists for their efforts. This was certainly true of Ćosić, whose May 1968 speech to the central committee of the Serbian League of Communists not inaccurately decried the rise of provincial nationalisms that accompanied decentralization.¹² It was also true of Serbian satirist Brana Crnčević, whose persistent mockery of Croatian nationalism cost him his job at *Žež*, a Serbian humor magazine, and of Antonije Isaković, who was compelled to leave the party after objecting to the famous "Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language" in April 1967. Mihailo Djurić, a Belgrade University philosopher, openly protested new constitutional amendments in 1971 and was imprisoned for it.

Many more suffered under accusations of nationalism in this era, losing their jobs and often their freedom because of their words. There is indeed irony to be found in the fact that Serbs who objected to the nationalisms of others were accused of nationalism themselves—but that, in point of fact, is a key part of my story. In Yugoslavia, unlike Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary, the source of oppression was more likely to be definitionally "national" rather than "human" or "existential." It was the context in which all Yugoslavs lived and worked. The fact that the regime defined itself according to its national policies meant that the national was fundamental. In such a situation, decrying the nationalism of others was itself nationalism.

This phase closed out with the promulgation of the Yugoslav constitution of 1974. This constitution, the culmination of a process that began in the early 1960s, institutionalized the new federal order in Yugoslavia. It destroyed the Serbia of the Serbian heart and soul. In the view of one recent Serbian commentary, it was "an ornamental piece of rhetoric and a justification for dictatorial (largely totalitarian) rule..."¹³ Kosovo and Vojvodina now had a status akin to that of the republics;

¹² Dobrica Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće: Članci i ogledi* (Ljubljana and Zagreb: Cankarjeva Založba, 1982).

¹³ Vojin Dimitrijević, "The 1974 Constitution as a Factor in the Collapse of Yugoslavia, or as a Sign of Decaying Totalitarianism," in Nebojša Popov, ed., *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2000), 419–20.

for most Serbs, Serbian communities of Bosnia and Croatia may as well have been in different countries. The response, though, was malaise, since the Tito regime had initiated a serious crackdown against the Serbian intellectual community following the Djurić episode.

Not all Serbian opposition to Tito was nationalist, not in the beginning. There was another much more prominent type of dissent among Serbs through the early 1980s. The same general process that prompted the growth of the sort of intermittent exhibitionist opposition I have described above also provoked a sort of dissent that conforms more readily with that of the northern tier. The famous *Praxis* group, consisting of Marxist philosophers from all of Yugoslavia's national communities, arose originally in the early 1960s as a contribution to the ongoing conversation about Yugoslavia's unique path to socialism. The group was always critical of Titoism, though, and the regime never responded favorably to its contributions to the discussion. The crucial moment in the development of this strand of opposition to the Titoism in Yugoslavia came with the student movement of 1968 at Belgrade University. Serbian members of the Praxis group encouraged the student rebels. Following the end of the student movement in early June 1968, the government shut down the student magazine *Student* and drove the student leaders and their professors from the university. The "Belgrade Eight" (all members of the *Praxis* group and professors at Belgrade University) included Mihailo Marković, Svetozar Stojanović, Ljubomir Tadić, Nebojša Popov, Zagorka Golubović-Pešić, and others. They were forced from their jobs by 1975 and hounded for the next decade and longer.¹⁴ Younger professors and students who followed their lead were also expelled from the university or forced to quit their jobs there. For many of them, what had been a vital Marxist opposition gradually turned into a more general search for standard liberal goals: the right to speak, the right to gather, the right to open critique of their political, social, economic, and cultural system (one thinks here of Kosta Čavoški and his focus

¹⁴ Gerson Sher, *PRAXIS: Marxist Humanism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977); Nebojša Popov, *Contra Fatum* (Zagreb: Mladost, 1989); Nebojša Popov, *Društveni sukobi/Izazov sociologiji; 'Beogradski jun' 1968* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008).

on the deadening Article 133 of the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, which forbade any speech or action that was construed by the regime to be “hostile enemy propaganda”). For them, the system that emerged in Yugoslavia after 1968, and more specifically after the proclamation of the 1974 constitution, was just as base as any other in Eastern Europe following the death of the Prague Spring.

The two sets of oppositionists that I have described were not exclusive: oppositionists who built their work on the foundation of national grievances coexisted and collaborated with opposition rooted in a Marxist critique of Yugoslav socialist development. In fact, while acknowledging their serious differences of opinion, they all vigorously defended each other’s right to critique the regime however they chose to. This commingling of opposition narratives led to much confusion then and later. For instance, the editors of *Praxis* defended Mihailo Djurić, whose ideas they could not have sanctioned.¹⁵ I should also add that neither of these groups were “movements” in any real sense—they were both just small groups of intellectuals nibbling at the fringes of Serbs’ collective conscience through the late 1970s.

The Death of Tito

Serbian opponents of the regime wrongly concluded that Tito’s death in 1980 would open the door to real discussion of the nature of the regime. They believed (or perhaps just hoped) that the problem was Tito, not something systemic. Their primary objective in attempting to engage in such a discussion was to revise the confederal verdict of the constitution of 1974. Some wanted to rebuild a Yugoslavia in which Serbs could feel unified and, most importantly, safe. Others believed that the 1974 constitution and the suppression of speech that accompanied it simply killed the possibility of progressive change in Yugoslavia. Quite quickly, though, it became clear that Tito’s death would not open the door to free discussion of the Yugoslav future. Tito’s heirs were afraid to change his system, and no discussion would

¹⁵ See the discussion in Miller, *The Nonconformists*, 202; the defense appeared in “Za slobodu akademske diskusije,” *Praxis* vol. 9, no. 3–4 (Zagreb: May 1972): 611–12.

be allowed. "After Tito, Tito!" went the official slogan—nothing would change, except perhaps the government's growing willingness to use repression to quiet opposition. Stagnation resulted, and provoked scattered, but more vocal, opposition. Dobrica Ćosić, a couple of members of the Praxis group, and a few others tried to initiate a journal (called *Јавност*, or "The Public") that would contribute to a close examination of the Titoist system and ways to improve upon it; their application was rejected. Ćosić has argued that this attempt, which came in the fall of 1980, would have allowed the journal to play a role akin to that of KOR in Poland.¹⁶ A couple of watchdog committees were formed. The first, created in 1982 during an uproar that attended the jailing of a Serbian poet named Gojko Djogo, who published some poetry that fairly obviously criticized the dead Tito, was called the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom; the second, called the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression, was founded in 1984 by Ćosić and many other Serbian intellectuals following the arrest of a group of students and, separately, the arrest of Vojislav Šešelj, then a recent PhD from the University of Sarajevo.¹⁷

From *Јавност* to the committees, the common theme, shared goal, was to see expression protected in the belief that it could only result in a better Yugoslavia. Here, the Serbian dissenters were embracing a part of Titoist dogma from an earlier era: intellectuals could contribute to the building of socialism by engaging in the *borba mišljenja*, or "struggle of ideas." This work in defense of free expression felt a bit like the work of Charter '77. One similarity was rhetorical: the opponents of the regime who emerged in Serbia in the 1980s argued that that regime, founded upon lies and maintaining itself through lies, could only successfully be fought with the truth. Thus the committees took it upon themselves to issue dozens if not hundreds of communiqués and petitions (few if any of which were available within Serbia or Yugoslavia) that drew attention to individual, unpublicized acts of repression by the regime. These communiqués did not only concern

¹⁶ In fact, Ćosić believes that had *Јавност* been approved, it would have provided a precedent for KOR (or perhaps Solidarity—his remark is not clear), which is of course not true; see Slavoljub Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu: Razgovori sa Dobricem Ćosićem* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1989), 248.

¹⁷ Gojko Djogo, *Vunena vremena* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1981).

Serbs; the committees were in fact ideologically and ethnically blind at this point. Thus petitions supporting Alija Izetbegović and Adem Demaci appeared alongside proclamations condemning the treatment of Vojislav Šešelj and others. Another similarity was that, like Charter '77, the Serbian committees were populated by folks from all corners: some were frank opponents of Titoism's so-called solution to the national question, which at this point for them amounted to the degradation of Serbia; others were either members of or heirs of the Praxis group and its student followers, who had long argued for a return to a purer form of Marxism. Some reflected both tendencies. (Among the members of the various committees discussed we could find Dobrica Ćosić, Ljubomir Tadić, Mihailo Marković, Nebojša Popov, Svetozar Stojanović, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Kosta Čavoški, Matija Bećković, Radovan Samardžić, Dimitrije Bogdanović, and others, which is to say a fair cross-section of the Belgrade intelligentsia, from left, right, and middle.) This ideological blindness, I think, was the quality that most distinguished these early-1980s committees. It also characterized Charter '77 and KOR. It was important, and it indicated a willingness to subjugate individual or group fractiousness to the greater good of the whole.

There came a point, however, when the attempt to work both sets of grievances into a coherent movement was bound to fail. Kosovo, of course, turned out to be the catalyst. The most potent symbol of that failure came in 1986, with the issuance of a petition in support of Kosovo's Serbian population signed by over 200 Serbian public figures.¹⁸ The petition used the most flamboyant nationalist imagery in making its point, which was that Serbs in Kosovo were persecuted not just in normal everyday terms familiar to all Yugoslavs, but in ways that were rooted in historical processes and national essences. "The methods [of persecution of Serbs] have remained the same," read the petition. "On old stakes there are again heads." When, say, Dobrica Ćosić signs such a petition, no one is particularly surprised. But to this day it is jarring to note that several of the signatures—those of Ljubomir Tadić, Zagorka Golubović-Pešić, and Mihailo Marković—were of longtime members of the Praxis group and thus critics of the

¹⁸ I discuss this petition in Miller, *The Nonconformists*, 264–65.

regime from the left. There were other examples of this phenomenon. It had now become clear that the universal had given way to the particular—that any coherent opposition rooted in universal principle had lost out to the much more insular and national. The justice of the grievances is not of interest to me here. What is of interest to me is that the signatories either willfully or obtusely promoted a thoroughly provincial concern—for the fate of Kosovo's Serbs—as a situation of vital interest for all of Yugoslavia, even humanity. That Slovenes or Croats would, at best, have difficulty comprehending the depth of Serbian passion for the issue seems a given to me. The petition marked the turn of Belgrade's otherwise Havelian discourse into one that was fundamentally parochial.

So, superficially, the Serbian intellectual community worked the same magic as those of Czechoslovakia and Poland, emphasizing the artificiality of life in a totalitarian regime, the need to find authenticity in a totalitarian world, the need to take responsibility for one's and one's own society's fate. Beneath that surface magic, though, there were serious differences of emphasis. The northern tier movements consciously sought the creation of civil societies that could be defined as universal constructs. The Serbian (and, I might add, Croatian) movements sought truth, authenticity, and all that, but in an ethnic context. Where Havel cast his pleas in individual terms, Ćosić spoke of the rights of his nation. Both spoke of the desire for dignity; in Havel's case, it was individual dignity. In Ćosić's, the dignity in question was national. When Ćosić or his colleagues discussed dignity, democracy, truth, it was always in terms of the collective. When Marxist-humanists of the *Praxis* group joined the Ćosićean view, the parochial effectively destroyed the universal in Serbian opposition. The concordance of views happened suddenly; after 1986, though, it is easy enough to trace an orthodox view that united most Serbian intellectual leaders, which held that Serbs' disunity was bad for Serbia and bad for Yugoslavia. This view was usually offered in hyperbolic and even frightening language.

Another point worth mentioning: while it is impossible to imagine Havel, Michnik, Charter '77, or KOR joining their respective governments in any enterprise, many—not all, but many—Serbian intellectual leaders did work with the Milošević regime. I believe that the very essence of the activities of Charter '77 and KOR was their rejection

of existing governments, parties, powers as illegitimate at their core. They built a new world alongside the old—and Gustav Husak and Stanislaw Kania needed not apply. To my ear it sounds ridiculous to even contemplate such a thing as Husak signing on to Charter '77 and Charter '77 welcoming him into the fold. Or to imagine Václav Havel endorsing the general secretary in any forum. For Havel and his contemporaries, one point of their movements was to create something new, something better, something pure. But quite a few Serbian intellectual leaders publicly announced their support for Milošević, and Mihailo Marković, Brana Crnčević, and others joined his party. At that point when Serbian intellectual oppositionists began to join the Milošević regime—whether as members of the Socialist Party of Serbia or as fellow travelers, the search for a Serbian Havel could be said to have ended in failure. And they did so for the simple reason that both they and Milošević himself had reduced their appeal to a reunification of Serbia. The intellectuals sold out, and Milošević rode the wave. They needed each other.

Conclusions

So, what would I have expected if I were looking for a Havel-like figure in Serbia (or, for that matter, Yugoslavia)? My own prejudices come to bear, here, of course. I would have hoped to find someone who, while noting the authoritarian nature of the Tito regime and that which followed it, would also have asserted that human rights are universal and that democracy should apply to all. This person would undoubtedly have derided Serbia's unequal position in Yugoslavia, but would have resisted the ready-made narrative of Serbia's victimization for one that emphasized the shared fate of all of the peoples of Yugoslavia. Such a person would have recognized the authoritarianism of the Milošević regime from its inception, rather than falling for its cheap embrace of a nationalism it obviously did not sincerely share. Such a person would have noted across the border the rise of other small-time nationalists like Franjo Tudjman and not allowed his fear of them to drive him even deeper into self-pitying despair. Such a person would have to have been even braver than Havel, more combative than Michnik. Frankly, such a person would have faced a task such as those other two

could not even imagine, such was the strength of ethnic mobilization in Yugoslavia by the late 1980s. But the ease with which dissenting voices (and here I mean dissenters from the new nationalist orthodoxy) were swallowed up or shouted down in Serbia and the rest of Yugoslavia indicates to me that conformist cowardice was the norm in all of Yugoslavia's republics by 1989.

If one accepts the scenario I have presented here, then, there are two or three possible explanations for what happened to the elusive Serbian Havel. One is that Serbs who might have played that role were driven by circumstance to fight a different battle, the one for the survival of their nation. Thus, the argument would go, Serbs had no choice—the context in which they worked, the type of oppression they suffered, the nature of the affronts to their dignity—were at their core national. They did not have the luxury of creating parallel polises or civil society when their nation was so direly threatened.¹⁹ Thus, to continue my use of two personalities somewhat symbolically, Dobrica Ćosić could not be Václav Havel because of the structures that conditioned his work. It should not be held against him that he could not combat the inevitable reduction of the Serbian game to ethnic unity; that was in fact what Serbs lacked, so that was what they fought for. Dobrica Ćosić becomes the man who could have been Havel, under different circumstances. He fought the good fight, but against enemies Havel did not have to fight.

A second possibility is that Dobrica Ćosić and much of the Serbian intellectual elite were not nationalists by necessity, but that they were nationalists by disposition. That, in fact, nationalism became such a force in Serbia not because it had to, because it was structurally predetermined, but because the most influential and effective Serbian cultural and intellectual and political leaders chose to make it so. This is a much uglier picture to paint of Serbs and Serbia, because it explicitly argues that Serbs and Serbia are different—exceptional in their embrace of nationalism in a truly extreme form. They were not compelled to defend their nation; they were simply aggressive nationalists, and they offered their Serbian people just what it wanted. One

¹⁹ It is only of interest here that Ćosić and his colleagues would nonetheless tell us that they *were* creating civil society in their work in the 1980s.

reasonable mediation between the arguments outlined here would be that circumstances made it impossible for a Havel to emerge; nevertheless, had circumstances been different, that Havel would *not* have been Ćosić. In other words, Ćosić and his fellow nationalist intellectuals could not have been anything but nationalists, but it was circumstances for the most part that made them relevant.

If either of these explanations works, then Havel could have come from elsewhere in the Serbian intellectual milieu. For instance, there was the small but noisy, generally ineffective, civic opposition to Milošević that emerged in the late 1980s and worked through the 1990s. I am thinking here of the Civic Alliance, headed by Vesna Pešić and supported by Nebojša Popov. Here was a very small group of people who could each sound an awful lot like any given leader of KOR or Charter '77. But Serbs did not respond to them. There were other politicized Serbian intellectuals of course. Many of the members of the '68 generation got involved in politics in the late 1980s and through the 1990s, and the parties they joined tended to espouse liberal platforms. In the conditions in which they operated, they all of course included the defense of Serbia as a primary component of their platforms. Among this group we could include Dragoljub Mićunović, one of the Belgrade Eight; Kosta Čavoški, a student in 1968; Vojislav Koštunica, who co-wrote an important book about Serbian pluralism following the Second World War with Čavoški; and even Vuk Drašković, a student in 1968 who later led the Serbian Renewal Movement. None of them ever achieved the influence befitting a Serbian Havel, and frankly most of them would have made for flawed copies had they enjoyed the necessary stature and influence. Since most of them ultimately found Ćosić's nationalism a comfortable position, we are left with the rather unpleasant possibility that there was no plausible alternative for Serbs.

Each of the possibilities described thus far has a rather mechanical feel to it: if only this or that condition had been different, the Serbian outcome would have been different (or: better). I would suggest considering a third alternative: given that Kosovo was central to the development of a Serbian opposition as early as 1966, when Ranković was purged, an examination of the Serbian cultural context would show that the type of opposition that merged principle with territorial and ethnic concerns emerged logically and naturally from the

history of Serbian discourse on the relationship of the nation to the state. In a very interesting article written for a conference held on the tenth anniversary of 1989, Irena Grudzińska Gross suggested a comparison between the Polish relationship to the “sacred territory” of the East and the Serbian attachment to Kosovo.²⁰ She notes that for Mickiewicz, the “people were not so much a single ethnicity as the body of all inhabitants of the historical Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth...it was a ‘cultural nation.’”²¹ The relationship between Poles and the lost sacred territories, she argues, is today just nostalgic. Gross offers no conclusions—she wrote her piece during and after the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999. But her desperate hope that somehow Serbs could achieve the same nostalgic relationship to Kosovo that Poles have nurtured over the past two or more centuries with regard to the eastern territories, and the sense—maybe nothing more than that—that such a relationship is impossible in the Serbian case, lead one to wonder if there is in fact a deeper, more profound connection in Serbian culture and history between the land, the people, and that which is sacred.²² She notes that Mickiewicz himself, an admirer of Serbian things, saw Serbs as far too immersed in the ancient and the tragic: “Their thoughts,” he wrote, “are not taken by active life, new history, richness of current events.”²³ The centrality of Kosovo to the growth of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s is obvious. Perhaps that relationship—that backwards-looking Serbian cultural habit—explains why, where Havel sought the Truth in universal norms

²⁰ Irena Grudzińska Gross, “Mickiewicz and the Question of Sacred Territory,” in Antohi and Tismaneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future*, 383–92.

²¹ Gross, *Mickiewicz*, 387.

²² In a passage worth applying to the Serbian case, Lynn Hunt, referencing Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils, asserts that “Many anthropologists and sociologists insist...that every cultural frame has a ‘center,’ which has sacred status. The sacred center makes possible a kind of social and political mapping; it gives the members of a society their sense of place. It is the heart of things, the place where culture, society, and politics come together.” See Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 87.

²³ Quoted in Gross, *Mickiewicz*, 391.

and human history, Ćosić and other Serbian cultural figures sought it by looking inward, with only Serbian history, Serbian culture, as his guide. Only thus can we bring into line the fact that the narrative embraced by Dobrica Ćosić argued for the centrality of Kosovo to any movement—Serbian or non-Serbian—that sought liberty and democracy. The stories Serbs tell themselves are not Havelian—they do not transport Serbs into the discourse of a global world of diversity, equality, and democracy—they pull that world back into the Serbian narrative.

CĂTĂLIN AVRAMESCU

*Communism, the Experience of Light
Electrification, and Legitimization
in USSR and Romania before 1989*

Communism was once famously described by Lenin as “the power of the Soviets plus the electrification of the entire country.” It is interesting to note, then, that most histories of Communism have been, to date, only histories of Soviet power.¹

From the vantage point of the history of ideas, Communism was an “ideology.” This is perhaps reading too much into the pretences of the Communist *doctrinaires*. Their intention was, indeed, to provide principles to support a set of policies. However, in the real world of the “workers’ movement,” ideas and arguments were blurred in the distance, eclipsed by more pressing concerns. Socialist parties and governments were rarely motivated by abstract ideals of equality and fairness. When they were not busy simply with staying in power, they were often concerned with overcrowding, long working hours and security of jobs. This was a movement that was conservative at heart, notwithstanding the fiery rhetoric of some of its self-proclaimed leaders.

The modernizing drive of the revolutionary Socialist movement was always marred by this duality. It made possible a hybrid regime where, like in the Stalinist 1930s, repression and abstinence were married with a nascent consumerist culture. It zigzagged between the dogmatic affirmation of revolutionary Marxism and fascination with *Amerikanizm*.² The electrified cityscape of Socialism was a field of cultural synthesis.

¹ One exception is Anindita Banerjee, “Electricity: Science Fiction and Modernity in Early Twentieth Century Russia,” *Science Fiction Studies* vol. 30, no. 1 (Mar., 2003): 49–71.

² See Hans Roger, “Amerikanizm and the Economic Development of Russia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 23, no. 3 (Jul., 1981): 382–420.

The purpose of my article is to re-establish the importance of the experience of light in the context of the Communist state. I will show that light was a central element in the collectivist experience, as it was understood both by the Communist leaders and their subjects. Light, therefore, was not just the object of a policy. It had a deeper, existential, meaning.

Even before the rise of modern Communism, light was an important dimension of social experience. The introduction of public lighting in seventeenth-century Paris was a significant step forward. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we witnessed the spread of the panoptic schemes, “total institutions,” as Foucault calls them, that use light to promote surveillance, discipline and control.³ In Victorian London, Crystal Palace awed visitors with its massive structure of iron and glass, a cathedral of light in the Industrial Age. The rhetoric of Enlightenment had already paved the way for the association between Light, Progress, and Truth. The spread of public gas lamps was made possible by the construction of a centralized system of pipes. Finally, the construction of a network of electrical distribution signified the dawn of the “era of administered light,” to use the expression of Gaston Bachelard.⁴

The advent of artificial light precipitated a severe disruption of traditional work patterns. The workday of the individual craftsman was regulated by the natural cycle of sunrise and sunset. Modern industrial production required large spaces and integrated operations.⁵ From the end of the nineteenth century these were flooded by the newly discovered light of electricity.

It was in the second part of the nineteenth century that a systematic attempt to connect electricity and Communism was made, in the work of August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*. In the third section of this text, “The Communistic Kitchen,” we learn that in the kitchen of the future women’s chores will be revolutionized:

³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *La Flamme d’une chandelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 90.

⁵ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night. The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (University of California Press, 1995), 8-9.

The kitchen equipped with electricity for lighting and heating is the ideal one. No more smoke, heat, or disagreeable odors! The kitchen resembles a workshop furnished with all kinds of technical and mechanical appliances that quickly perform the hardest and most disagreeable tasks. Here we see potato and fruit-paring machines, apparatus for removing kernels, meat-choppers, mills for grinding coffee and spice, ice-choppers, corkscrews, bread-cutters, and a hundred other machines and appliances, all run by electricity, that enable a comparatively small number of persons, without excessive labor, to prepare a meal for hundreds of guests. The same is true of the equipments for house-cleaning and for washing the dishes.⁶

Electricity, therefore, was a driving force with the potential to transform the entire sphere of domestic life into something approaching a Pasteurized Communist ideal:

As the central kitchen will do away with the private kitchen, so central heating and electric lighting plants will do away with all the trouble connected with stoves and lamps. Warm and cold water supply will enable all to enjoy daily baths. Central laundries and drying-rooms will assume the washing and drying of clothes; central cleaning establishments, the cleaning of carpets and clothes. In Chicago carpet-cleaning machines were exhibited that cleaned carpets in an incredibly short time, calling forth the wonder and admiration of the ladies who visited the exposition. The electric door opens at a slight pressure of the finger and shuts off itself. Electric contrivances carry letters and newspapers to every floor of the houses, and electric elevators save one the trouble of climbing stairs. The interior furnishing of the houses, the coverings of walls, floors, furniture, etc., will be so arranged as to make house-cleaning easy and to avoid the gathering of dust and germs.

⁶ August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*, transl. by Meta L. Stern (New York: Socialist Literature Co., 1910), chapter XXVII.

Bebel's text is all the more remarkable as it was published in 1875, a few years before Edison patented a primitive version of the incandescent bulb, the first demonstration of which drew a large crowd: "People stood overwhelmed with awe, as if in the presence of the supernatural. The strange weird light was exceeded in power only by the sun, rendered the square as light as midday [...] Men fell on their knees, groans were uttered at the sight, and many were dumb with amazement."⁷

In the same vein as Bebel, testifying to the endurance of the fascination with electricity, another Progressist writer, E. Lilienthal, wrote in 1909:

The garden city of the future will not only contain the town hall, the central gas, electric lighting and heating plant, the schools and libraries, but a central kitchen also. It is not impossible that the underground passages, containing the electric cables and heating-pipes, will be expanded, and that through them small automatic wagons will carry the food directly into the residences upon an order by telephone.⁸

That the city of the future should be clean, safe, fast and electric was already an axiom before 1917. The Chicago World Fair of 1894 dazzled the visitor with unseen before multitudes of electric lights. With the Singer Building, in 1907, American corporations began advertising their prowess by flooding their skyscrapers at night with artificial light.⁹ The same year, Maxim Gorky recorded his reaction after a visit at the amusement park at Coney Island: "With the advent of night a fantastic city all of fire suddenly rises from the ocean into the sky. Thousands of sparks glimmer in the darkness, limning in fine, sensitive outline on the black background of the sky shapely towers of

⁷ See D. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of New Technology 1880-1940* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1990), 3.

⁸ Quoted in Babel, *Idem*.

⁹ See "Dream Cities: The Uncanny Powers of Electric Light", in Potts, J and Scheer, E. (eds.) *Technologies of Magic. A Cultural Study of Ghosts, Machines, and the Uncanny* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006), 2-13.

miraculous castles, palaces and temples. [...] Fabulous beyond conceiving, ineffably beautiful, is this fiery scintillation.¹⁰

Russia, too, had a love affair with the electric light that pre-dated the October revolution.¹¹ In 1876, before Edison, a Russian inventor, Pavel Jablochkov, patented an electric-arc lamp briefly used for public lighting in Paris and London. In 1883 a magical display of light was organized by the authorities when the bell tower of the cathedral Ivan the Great was fitted with more than 3000 electric bulbs. At the beginning of the First World War most central streets and squares in Moscow were illuminated at night. Moreover, Symbolist artists such as Scriabin were on their way to develop a Promethean rhetoric of light, fire and sun.¹² Mayakovsky flatly declared: "After electricity, I lost interest in Nature. Too backward." Russian utopias, like Alexander Bogdanov's *Red Star* (1908), were already looking towards the stars.

In the years before the October Revolution there were signs, in Russia, of the development of a mystique of light in the context of the preoccupation with the longevity and even immortality of the physical body. In an 1889 essay, "The Beauty of Nature," Solovyov discusses the interpenetration of light/Spirit and substance. Beauty, for the Russian philosopher, was the property of "illuminated" material forms. Perfectly fused and ordered illuminated structures of Spirit/Matter are incorruptible and immortal. Man, as the crowning achievement of evolution, is tasked with creating the perfect balance between matter and light in Nature, transforming the latter in "the Woman clothed in the Sun."¹³

After the Revolution, Orthodox and Gnostic elements of the discourse associating light with themes of creation and redemption are recognizable in a number of speculations in the margins of the official ideology. The "Anarcho-Biocosmists" were inspired by the ideas

¹⁰ See R. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994), 29.

¹¹ Jonathan Coopersmith, *The Electrification of Russia, 1880-1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

¹² See Polina Dimova, *The Poet of Fire: Aleksandr Skriabin's Synaesthetic Symphony "Prometheus" and the Russian Symbolist Poetics of Light*, in *eScholarship* (Berkeley: University of California, 2009).

¹³ Irene Masig-Delic, *Abolishing Death. A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 111-12.

of the philosopher N. F. Fedorov and included luminaries such as Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the rocket scientist, and Leonid Krasin, the designer of Lenin's mausoleum. Samosedov, the revolutionary hero of the novel "Dark Waters" and another member of this circle, Nikolay Ognyov, were fascinated by fire as an instrument of purification and resurrection. The crematorium was the place where those unworthy of restoration would be burned forever in "hellfire." In the same crematoria, the bodies of the builders of the New World were repaired in view of the resurrection. This should have the added benefit of eliminating the need for unprofitable cemeteries, with their Orthodox mystique of the (un-hygienic) earth. In truth, in 1921 the Biocosmists founded a club, in Moscow, "The Crematorium of Biocosmists." In the new age ushered by the Revolution, they maintained, all things of the past should be consumed by fire, which will allow for the creation of the new.¹⁴

With a more practical bend of mind, Lenin was well acquainted with the practical application of electricity. During his exile in Germany, England and Switzerland he became aware of the gap between Russia and the West in the harnessing of the new driving force of industry and civilization.

From a very early stage of the Bolshevik revolution, electricity was seen as the key to developing the Land of the Soviets. For Lenin and his associates, power plants and transmission grids were means to overcome the differences between city and countryside and taking a lead over Capitalism. Lenin's interest in electrification dates back to his *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899), written during the Siberian exile he shared with Gleb Krzhizhanovskii, an engineer who became the director of the committee in charge of the plan for the electrification of Russia (GOELRO).¹⁵ Like Russian peasants, Lenin regarded electric current in a quasi-mystical perspective. As he declared in an interview in 1920: "Electrification will regenerate Russia [...] the soil of the Soviet system will produce a decisive victory of the principles

¹⁴ Idem, 234-5.

¹⁵ Paul R. Josephson, "Projects of the Century" in *Soviet History: Large-Scale Technologies from Lenin to Gorbachev*, *Technology and Culture* vol. 36, no. 3 (Jul., 1995): 524.

of communism in our country, the principles of a cultural life without exploiters, capitalists, landowners, and merchants.”¹⁶

Again in 1920, Lenin arranged for a demonstration in the Kremlin as to how electrification will advance at the scale of the entire Soviet Russia, using a very large map studded with bulbs. So much power was needed for the display that electricity in Moscow had to be cut in order for the visitors to be entertained.¹⁷ But such costs hardly mattered for the fulfillment of Utopia. The messianic promise of a future with no shadows was shared by many beyond the narrow circle of the Kremlin. In a poem from 1917, a young proletarian proclaimed:

We are the countless, awesome Legions of Labour,
We have conquered the spaces of oceans and land,
With the light of the artificial suns we have light up the cities,
Our proud souls burn with the fire of revolt (...)
Young girls in the luminous Kingdom of the Future
Will be more beautiful than Venus of Milo (...)
We are everybody, we are in everything, we are the flame and the
victorious light,
We are our own Deity, and Judge, and Law.¹⁸

Electricity, for Lenin, encapsulated a principle of order. He took a keen interest in the work of Pavlov and went to great lengths to support the research on the material nature of the processes in the brain. For Pavlov, the brain was a kind of machine operated by means of electrical impulses. Pavlov and his school studied in detail the formation of reflexes in the famous experiments that promised to offer a firm foundation to the science of behavior control.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams. Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 49.

¹⁷ Idem, 48.

¹⁸ Quoted in Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time. Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 67.

¹⁹ Recently discovered footage shows that Ivan Pavlov experimented on children, not only on dogs, his famous technique of “conditioned reflexes.” See Michael Mosley, *The Brain. A Secret History*, part 1, *Mind Control* (2011).

Light blended into the imaginary of a Revolution that promised a “radiant future.” The Bolsheviks constructed, by degrees, what Jean Starobinski has called, in another context, the “solar myth.” The exercise of sovereignty was portrayed as the origin of the rays of light cast over the new order of things.

The new, Utopian, topography also reflected the preoccupation with light. In 1925, a Communist commune was established in North Caucasus, “Communist Lighthouse.” It had the honor of being visited by Trotsky and it had a reputation of prosperity. In the Volga region a party of visiting Americans stumbled upon another Communist commune, “Red Lighthouse.” It gathered about 200 demobilized guerrillas and it also appeared to be thriving.²⁰

The rhetoric of illumination is implied in the creation, after the October Revolution, of the Commissariat for Enlightenment headed by Anatoly Lunacharsky. He was the most influential supporter of an attempt to fuse religion and materialism in a movement called “God-building.”²¹ Lunacharsky described the regime brought on by a century of Communism as a “bright order.” Until then, the masses were to be entertained with a different kind of spectacle: the material body of the deceased leader deified in a mausoleum, in a coffin of glass. Vladimir Ilich, according to Lunacharsky, who headed the efforts to design a permanent shrine for Lenin, was “a prophet, a sage of the new Communist world ... its champion, its martyr ... totally destroyed his gigantic brain ... by his excessive, superhuman, enormous work ... In him are concentrated rays of light and heat.”²²

The subversive potential of Lunacharsky’s tactics were denounced in a *New York Times* article, “Reds are Ruining the Children of Russia,” from June 11, 1919. There were no books, no lessons, no segregation

²⁰ Robert G. Wesson, “The Soviet Communes,” in *Soviet Studies* vol. 13, no. 4 (Apr., 1962): 353.

²¹ On the Commissariat of Enlightenment see Sheila Fitzpatrick’s classical study *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

²² Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997), 200.

of sexes in the dormitories, and, of course, there was no moral or religious guidance:

To this Satanic system of depravation “children’s balls” are organized frequently in the schools by Lunacharsky’s orders. The parents are forced to send the children to these dances, which last until the early hours of morning. Last winter, in the streets of Moscow and Petrograd, it was painful to see miserable mothers waiting all night in the snow outside of brilliantly illuminated school buildings here there boys and girls were dancing the tango and foxtrot.

After Lenin’s death, Stalinism continued the politics of electrification. Giant dams were built in order to supply the needs of an expanding industry. A nascent consumerist culture was officially encouraged.²³ Electric light was literally everywhere. In a photomontage (*The Current is Switched On*) from October 1932 by the Suprematist artist El Lissitzky, one could see Stalin dominating half of the picture. In the background, the urban lights of Moscow. Three powerful searchlights surge in a dialog of light. In the other half of the picture a hand, presumably that of a worker, is about to turn on an electrical switch.²⁴

The aesthetization of experience continued even during the war. As instruments of propaganda, searchlights descended on the battlefield during the final assault on Berlin, when a large number of very powerful floodlights were concentrated during a massive infantry assault on the German positions. Zhukov apparently believed that this tactic would blind the enemy. Instead, it turned out that it rather blinded the Soviet soldiers, who were exposed in the open.²⁵

A triumph of the new visual style was the inauguration, in 1937, of the five ruby stars atop the Kremlin spires. Each was an elaborate

²³ For Stalinist consumerism, see Amy E. Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930’s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

²⁴ See Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment. From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 174.

²⁵ See Anthony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (London: Viking Penguin, 2002), 217.

product of Soviet engineering, weighting one and a half tons and wired to a system of ventilation and cleaning. They marked a step towards the divinization of Stalin and were a secularized version of the Star of Bethlehem, multiplied by five.²⁶

The Stalinist musicals also made heavy use of the symbolism of light. In *Swineherdess*, the hero and the heroine sing “The Song of Moscow”:

*Everything's fine in spacious Moscow
The Kremlin Stars shine against the blue sky
And just as rivers meet in the sea
So people meet here in Moscow.*²⁷

Popular culture was being re-worked by propagandists so as to reflect the historical achievement of Stalin and his Bolshevik party in the electrification of the villages. An anthology of “Russian Soviet folklore” contained a song collected in the Rostov district, *Lenin Should See the Village Now*. Every villager worked in the fields and enjoyed the wonders of electricity at home:

*Lenin should see the threshing floor now
Grain is sorted by electricity
And the poured grain glitters like amber
We're living the new way, Lenin's way.*²⁸

It was, however, the city, not the village, that was the main stage of the wonders of electricity as harnessed by Soviet authorities. Architecture was a major support and occasion of the politics of light. It was during the late 1920s that a new style, modern, functional and geometric,

²⁶ Julia Bekman Chadaga, “Light in Captivity: Spectacular Glass and Soviet Power in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Slavic Review* vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring, 2007): 101-3.

²⁷ Quoted in Richard Taylor, “But Eastward, Look, the Land is Brighter. Toward a Topography of Utopia in the Stalinist Musical,” in Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, eds., *The Landscape of Stalinism. The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 213.

²⁸ Quoted in Frank J. Miller, “The Image of Stalin in Soviet Russian Folklore,” *Russian Review* vol. 39, no. 1 (Jan., 1980): 66.

was put together from different sources. Boulevards at night became walls of light, where the observed and the subject of observation often coincided. A hero of one of Platonov's short stories experiences from a distance the awe-inspiring display of the Soviet capital. The city light "hummed like great music; the horizon reflected its glow back to the earth."²⁹

A landmark of this integration was the Narkofim building, built in 1928 and designed by Moisei Ginzburg. Conceived as a "Social Condenser," the internal layout of the building was calculated to intensify the circulation of individuals so as to multiply their interactions. Private spaces were reduced to a minimum. The exterior of the building was a geometric display of long, horizontal, uninterrupted lines.

One of the Soviet architects who were open to experimenting with light was Konstantin Melnikov. An influential designer, he produced a number of proposals among which was the blueprint for a Green City remotely inspired by the ideas of Charles Fourier. Solar pavilions would enable the Soviet workers to relax in the concentrated rays of the sun, even in winter.³⁰

The most bizarre attempt to fuse architecture and light was, arguably, the project of Tatlin's Tower. Designed in 1919 to become the headquarters of the Bolshevik party in Petrograd and a monument to the Third International, it was envisaged as a 400-meters structure of steel and glass, higher than the Eiffel Tower. The blueprints of the tower show a combination of rotating geometrical modules providing for different functions such as "executive activities." The structure was tilted at 23.5 degrees, the same as the inclination of the earth's axis. It was also an observation tower, with visitors transported by different mechanical contraptions. At the top there were screens and even projectors that could transmit propaganda into the clouds. Nikolai Radlov described the tower as a "naive, preposterous, monstrous creature with

²⁹ Quoted in Keith Livers, "Scatology and Eschatology: The Recovery of the Flesh in Andrei Platonov's *Happy Moscow*," *Slavic Review* vol. 59, no. 1 (Spring, 2000): 160.

³⁰ On Melnikov's project for a Green City, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 113-14.

a radio-telegraph horn on its head, and the Legislative Congress inside its swollen belly reaches for the sun.”³¹

The Socialist metropolis was thus transformed into a stage where the theater of power required the participation of the citizens in a rigorously choreographed show of light. Ideologically, the original promise of Communism was radical equality. In the twentieth century, Stalinism legitimized itself by offering radical modernity.

The radical break with the past meant that the Bolshevik society was already one step into the future. One of the foundational myths of Stalinism was that of the existence of a radically different, Bolshevik culture. It was one that was heroic, scientific and inevitable. Its vocabulary was often that of magical thinking. Witness the reaction of a senior anchor of the Soviet television when, in 1961, Khrushchev announced that communism will be achieved within his lifetime: “As Khrushchev spoke those words, the sun came out and the entire [CPSU] Congress seemed to light up. See, we told each other, even nature believes in our cause! That’s when my wife and I decided to have our first daughter. We hoped that she would live under Communism.”³²



In Romania, electrification followed roughly the same pattern as Stalinist Russia in the first decade of Communism. In 1950, the leaders of the Soviet satellite regime adopted a 10-year electrification plan that was considered “successful.”³³ Emphasis was on building the power grid and extending it to the villages. Large dams were built, such as the “V.I. Lenin” dam at Bicaz, in 1962. The investment in the energy sector was, by all standards, large. Between 1951 and 1963 it

³¹ Quoted in Alexei Alexeyevich Kurbanovsky, “Freud, Tatlin, and the Tower: How Soviet Psychoanalysts Might Have Interpreted the Monument to the Third International,” *Slavic Review* vol. 67, no. 4 (Winter, 2008): 903.

³² Quoted in Carol Barner-Barry and Cynthia Hody, “Soviet Marxism-Leninism as Mythology,” *Political Psychology* vol. 15, no. 4 (Dec., 1994): 620-1.

³³ Dragoş Petrescu, “Conflicting Perceptions of (Western) Europe: The Case of Communist Romania 1958-1989,” in José M. Faraldo, Paulina Gulińska-Jurgiel and Christian Domnitz, eds., *Europa im Ostblock: Vorstellungen und Diskurse (1945-1991)* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2008).

accounted for 40 percent of all investment in industry. The luminous present was especially contrasted with the war period, with its curfews and destruction of the infrastructure.

The rhetoric of light was officialized. The Party promised a “Golden Age”; the Secretary General was the guiding light. Electricity was revealed as an efficient, necessary and material force leading to progress. The propagandists of the regime calculated that one kilowatt of electricity would milk forty cows, power a radio for ten hours or shear five hundred sheep.³⁴ Romania was thrust on the path of achieving “energetic independence.”

The strangest twist of this story occurred after 1965, when the new leadership of the Party increasingly looked towards American-style consumerism in an attempt to legitimize the regime. Official structures and fountains were illuminated at night, supermarkets were built and fluorescent advertisements started to appear on the main boulevards of Bucharest. On the shores of the Black Sea a number of tourist resorts were established, knock-off copies of Las Vegas, complete with Luna Park amusements. Sorin Preda, who arrived in Bucharest as an 18-year-old, described the period as follows:

In the 1970s, life in Bucharest really started toward midnight. After a concert or a play, people went for a walk, to enjoy themselves. The elegant downtown restaurants were full of artists and beautiful girls. The best-known writers and journalists dined in Capșa and Berlin [Restaurants], while at the Mignon the first private restaurant had opened, owned by the Chivu brothers, where you could find the freshest seafood, brought in that very day from Paris by air. The city adulated its artists, receiving Nichita as it would a handsome and rebellious prince, and Marin Preda like a patriarch. The lights shone on the streets and there were even a few Neon signs, American-style.³⁵

Here, electricity and light accomplished a similar role as in the Soviet Union. They were elements of the theater of everyday life, reinforcing

³⁴ Florin Mihai, “Lumină pentru fiecare cătun!” *Jurnalul Național*, February 13, 2008.

³⁵ In Sorin Preda, “Cu dragoste despre București,” *Formula As* (2005): 651.

the official party line that life was becoming happier and more prosperous, catching up with the comforts afforded by capitalists.

More important, however, is the role of light in the manifestation of authority. Communism portrayed itself as a radical break with the past. It developed a set of rituals to mark, emphasize and celebrate this transformation of the nature of political power. Gradually, it became co-substantial with its own celebration. Electricity was integrated into what was, in effect, a liturgy of social control. It realized the dream of the instantaneous and immaterial action at a distance, mysterious and yet efficacious. It reinforced metaphors of hygiene and surveillance.

Artificial light, by communicating the very fact of its improbable existence, conveyed a message of the presence of a political authority it was dependent on. As Marshall McLuhan observed in *Understanding Media*:

The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message. ... The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized. For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth.³⁶

Communism understood itself as a regime of the extraordinary. It mastered the atom and it reached for the stars. It required the re-enacting of secular miracles. Electrical light was its aura.

Already in the eighteenth century, at the court of the French king, a demonstration of the power of electricity involved the transmission of a current from a generator through a long line of monks who shook hands. As a result, they jumped into the air, to the amusement of the court. Ceaușescu organized shows, at night, on artificially illuminated stadiums, where large crowds would move as one composite being. This “wonder” was proof that state power had reached a stage bordering on the miraculous. Rivers were diverted, mountains leveled and agricultural output doubled and then trebled.

³⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), 23.

The incandescent metal became a key symbol of Communism. Soviet and Romanian visual propaganda witnessed a fascination with red-hot molten metal and metallic sparks. In the nineteenth century Engels claimed that iron was “the last and most important of all those raw materials that have played a revolutionary role in history.”³⁷ However, it was not just the economic and political importance of steel and steelworkers that accounts for the preeminence of glowing iron in the visual culture of Communism. It was a different stage of History that Stalinism claimed to have reached, one that was “qualitatively” superior. The flows of molten metal carried with it strong connotations of progress and power. In the fiery atmosphere of the steelworks, work was sacralized, inasmuch as it was the occasion of a sacrificial and alchemical transformation of matter and energy.

In the real world, however, things were far from being altogether luminous. The nature of the transformation was aptly described by Piotr Sztompka as “fake modernity,” one that betrayed a legacy of “civilizational incompetence.”³⁸ What the regime often presented as proof of the uncontested superiority of socialist scientific management was a mere optical illusion not meant to last. The same witness who at the beginning of the 1970s marveled at the spectacle of light noticed that at the beginning of the 1980s the atmosphere in Bucharest had changed considerably: “Not even when the Mignon restaurant was closed, and the light bulbs downtown disappeared one by one, did people stop hoping. It’s as if no one wanted to believe that everything could end so quickly, in an absurd and unfair twist of history.”

A dramatic development, one that seriously undermined the legitimacy of the regime, was the widespread phenomenon of blackouts. All of a sudden, it was no longer possible to take electricity for granted. Millions of families now sat in the dark, often at random times during the night. People started to make provisions of candles they bought

³⁷ Friedrich Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Werke* (Berlin, 1962), vol. 21, 158, quoted in Rolf Hellebust, “Aleksii Gastev and the Metallization of the Revolutionary Body,” *Slavic Review* vol. 56, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 518.

³⁸ Piotr Sztompka, “Civilizational Incompetence: The Trap of Post-Communist Societies,” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* vol. 22, no. 2 (April 1993): 85–95.

from churches, of matches and flashlights, assuming they were able to get hold of them, in stores that were often literally empty. The deficiencies of the system were exposed dramatically in the massive blackout of May 10, 1977, when due to a cascade of errors, most of the national grid was taken down. The public mood turned cynical. A joke asked: What did we have before the candle? Answer: Electricity.

What caused the demise of the politics of electrification in the late Stalinist economy? In 1985, Romania produced more electricity *per capita* than Italy, Greece or Portugal.³⁹ At the same time, though, the percentage of electricity used by domestic households declined sharply, in 1989, to just 5,1 percent of the general output. The restrictions and the blackouts of that period are to be explained, in part, by the decision of the Party elites to divert resources towards the heavy industry and the chemical industry, in the name of a “second industrialization.” Reliable figures are hard to find, but data suggest that aluminum smelters alone consumed up to 15 percent of the total output of electricity. Whatever the cause, the effects were dramatic. In a report from February 16, 1988, the Organizational Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party admitted that public lighting in the rural areas and small cities was virtually eliminated, and that in the large cities it was reduced by around 50 percent.⁴⁰ Most people would keep a box of wax candles at hand, in case the electricity was cut. The irony is that the candles were bought from churches, the only reliable providers of such luxuries, in a turn that the officially atheist regime preferred to ignore.

The story of the economic decline of Socialist Romania is largely to be written. The case of the Soviet economy, however, is much better studied. In the 1970s, there was a slowdown in the Soviet economic output. This was the consequence of the rise of the military expenses precipitated by the Cold War, and, more significantly, by the internal transformations of the Soviet economy itself. During the first decades

³⁹ See D. Demekas, E. Borensztein and J. Ostry, “An Empirical Analysis of the Output Declines in Three Eastern European Countries,” *IMF Staff Papers*, March 1993.

⁴⁰ ANIC, fond CC al PCR – Secția Organizatorică, dosar nr. 4/1988, f. 13v., quoted in *Raportul Comisiei Prezidențiale pentru Studiul Dictaturii Comuniste*, 424.

of Communism, there was a surplus of labor which fueled economic expansion. The end of the surplus labor economy and the decision of the Soviet authorities to invest in inefficient economic activities in the North, while at the same time pouring large amounts of money into retooling obsolete factories, resulted in a steady economic decline.⁴¹

The other reason for the progressive blackout of the public sphere was the hardening of the ideological line, especially after the “July Theses” of 1971. Issued after a visit to China and Korea, these statements signaled an intensification of “patriotic work” and the starting of the rooting out of Western influences. The cultural mood darkened considerably in the following years, as a militant and austere version of Communism was gradually imposed over a country that experienced, in the late 1960s, a brief period of liberalization. In the 1980s the Party would unleash a swift, but stubborn campaign against videotape shows or satellite receivers. Disco and hard-rock music were virtually banned. The Black Sea resorts were forced to dim their lights after 10 pm and to offer the tourists a more patriotic cuisine.

As a cultural system, Romanian Communism, like its Soviet model, was eclectic. In the 1960s consumerism was tolerated and even encouraged as part of a drive to modernize the economy and the society. In the context of the conflict between Bucharest and Moscow that reached a peak in 1968, the officials of the regime even advanced the theory of the “convergence” of the two grand systems, Socialism and Capitalism.

On the other hand, though, Communist has retained an element of primitivism. Communist leaders feared the sophistication of modern, fast-paced urban life and the temptations that were inherent to it. Neon and consumerism would prove reminiscent of the dreaded American imperialism for an elite that ultimately upheld an austere Marxist-Leninist ideology of accumulation, egalitarianism, and control.

⁴¹ Robert C. Allen, “The Rise and the Decline of Soviet Economy,” *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue canadienne d’Econometique* vol. 34, no. 4 (Nov., 2001): 878–79.

BRADLEY ABRAMS

*Buying Time:
Consumption and Political
Legitimization in Late Communist
Czechoslovakia*

I would like to start by offering a statement that might seem self-evident: both consumption and consumerism were terribly weak in Eastern Europe under Communism. Of course, I do not think that this is completely true. I believe that it is somewhat, although not totally, a misreading of Eastern European history. It is true that the levels of consumption and the modes of consumerism differed in the East and the West, and any facile equation of developments in this regard on the two sides of the Iron Curtain is doomed to oversimplification. Nonetheless, I would argue that the Eastern European experience of consumption after 1968 is valuable, not least because it helps us to think about European developments as a whole. In particular, looking at communist East-Central Europe—the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia—through the prism of consumption and consumerism allows us to add a new and valuable dimension to understanding the end of the communist experiment, one that helps us grasp why hundreds of thousands of formerly complacent members of the “silent majority” or the “gray zone”¹ filled the streets in 1989. Additionally, it might help us to understand why the “return to Europe,” so widely touted in Eastern Europe in the years immediately

¹ This term is used to refer to the vast majority of citizens of East-Central Europe, those who were neither highly placed within the regime nor actively participated in dissident or oppositional movements, and were “for the most part consumption-oriented and politically uninterested.” See Jiřina Šiková, “The ‘Grey Zone’ and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia,” in Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, ed., *Good-Bye Samizdat* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 183.

after the fall of communism, has proven in many ways easier than most thought it would be, a point to which I will return in my conclusion.

To see why looking at consumption and consumerism helps us to see larger, pan-European patterns, I need to say a few words about the lifecycle of communism.² Under the Stalinist regimes of the late-1940s and early 1950s, communism relied primarily on ideology for both legitimization and self-legitimization. This changed over the decade and a half following Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech." The speech condemned Stalin's excesses and opened the door for a revisionist Marxism that contributed to the revolts in Hungary and Poland later that year. However, it was not until 1968, and the failure of the Prague Spring's hope to create a liberal Marxism often called "socialism with a human face," that it became evident to many that Marxism could no longer serve as a means either for legitimizing Communist rule to the public or as a way for the regimes to legitimize their own rule to themselves.³

What emerged in Marxism's wake was an attempt by the regimes to rely on a primarily economic mode of legitimization, couched in what has been called by many observers a "tacit social contract." In this, the regimes offered a reasonable and steadily rising standard of living and a social safety net in return for political quiescence. For our purposes, two elements of this contract are important. First, in the 1970s the governments of East-Central Europe greatly expanded the production of consumer goods and encouraged consumerism. Living standards rose perceptibly and considerably through the first half of the decade. For example, in Poland average real wages rose by a total of 41 percent, and the average annual growth rate of personal and social consumption reached almost 9 percent from 1971–1975.⁴

² Here I am following the lines of argument expressed by Katharine Verdery, "What Was Socialism, and Why Did It Fall?" in her *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), 19–38, and in George Schöpflin's *Politics in Eastern Europe* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), among others.

³ On this, see my "From Revisionism to Dissent: The Creation of Post-Marxism in Central Europe in the Wake of 1968," in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion and Utopia* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 179–96.

⁴ Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *The Polish Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 316. See the comment

Similarly, in Czechoslovakia real wages grew by almost 20 percent and personal consumption alone grew by 20 percent in the same years.⁵ Second, especially in Poland, the socialist consumerism encouraged by the regimes was financed to some extent by borrowing. The Eastern European regimes used the money both to hold up their end of the tacit social contract, by subsidizing consumption, and to invest in upgrading industrial infrastructure. Newer machinery and the comparative advantage Eastern Europe had in labor prices would, it was planned, led to improved sales of Eastern goods on Western markets, and the resulting hard currency earnings would repay the debt.

This strategy came to pieces in the late 1970s, when waste, corruption and the diversion of fiscal resources to consumption all contributed to its demise. Polish net hard currency debt reached \$24.5 billion in 1980, while that of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and East Germany reached \$3.6 billion, \$7 billion, and almost \$12 billion, respectively.⁶ By this time, borrowing was being done less to finance industrial and infrastructural modernization, and more in an attempt to maintain the now raised living standards and, hence, the tacit social contract. Most famously, in Poland these conditions contributed to the rise of Solidarity, but across the region living standards began to stagnate, never to rise markedly again in the communist era. In this regard, the stagnation of consumption should be seen as an underlying, but important, factor in communism's collapse.

by J.F. Brown: "In Poland the atmosphere in the early 1970s was positively euphoric...[T]here seemed to be nothing but success and confidence, both based on an economic progress that seemed indefinite." J.F. Brown, *Eastern Europe and Communist Rule* (Durham: Duke UP, 1988), 178.

⁵ On real wages, see Lenka Kalinová, *K sociálním dějinám Československa v letech 1969–1989* (Prague: VŠE, 1999), 37. For personal consumption, see Václav Čáp and Stanislav Dubský, *Dlouhodobé časové řady 1945–1980* (Prague: Výzkumný ústav sociálně ekonomických informací, 1981), 109. For models for rectifying official figures that yield a personal consumption rate of 20–25 percent, see Vladimír Nachtigal, *Problems of the Dynamics and the Character of the Czechoslovak Economic Development during 1961–1988* (Prague: Ekonomický ústav ČSAV, 1991), 94–95. Hungarian national income grew by 35 percent over the same period. See Iván T. Berend and György Ránki, *The Hungarian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), 289.

⁶ Brown, 507.

There are several instructive lessons to be learned from the turn to consumption in the wake of the Prague Spring. Above all, the fact that the strategy ultimately failed should not obscure the fact that for a half-decade or more there was a rapid rise in consumption that was sponsored by the regimes themselves. This experience marked a generation and signaled a shift in the regimes' way of legitimizing their rule to themselves and their publics. Furthermore, the shift was one that the regimes could not go back on. The choice of a primarily economic mode of legitimization left them with no fallback position. A return to ideology would neither have been accepted by the populations, nor likely even by many of the party's cadres themselves. The regimes had staked their hopes of legitimacy, or at least acquiescence, on raising the standard of living, and when their ability to provide this faltered, so did they.

To illustrate some of these developments, before returning to Europeanization, I would like to draw on my current research on Czechoslovakia. My project relies, among others, on two rather unique sets of sources. The first is the results of two large sociological surveys of the Czechoslovak population. The first of these, taken in 1978, asked almost 200 questions to over 17,000 respondents, a huge sample for a country of only 15 million people. The second was taken in 1984 and was considerably more wide-ranging, asking almost 600 questions to over 18,000 respondents. The second set of sources is information culled from roughly 200 top-secret public opinion surveys commissioned by various state and party offices between 1969 and 1989, especially from the 100 or so that deal more or less directly with consumption and consumer responses and desires.

There are several points that I want to make over the ensuing pages. First, I want to establish that the regime in the first half of the 1970s placed its emphasis on raising consumption. Second, I want to exhibit, with some data, the substantial rise in consumption in the spheres of household appliances, consumer electronics and automobiles. Third, I want to show that the growth in aggregate consumption was generalized, and particularly, that it was not just the province of Party members. Fourth, I want to show that after the mid- to late-1970s, this growth in consumption fell into a deep stagnation, and that the regime knew it. Finally, I want to outline the views of the population on their own standard of living.

There seems little doubt that the Czechoslovak communist regime aimed to establish its ability to satisfy material desires, desires that it was itself creating, as the defining characteristic of its role. This was a political aim as well as an economic one, as the party head, Gustáv Husák, made clear in his speech at the Fourteenth Party Congress, held in 1971:

[T]he Party lays basic stress on a permanent and dynamic development of the economy, on satisfying to an increasing degree the material and spiritual requirements of the working people. We know the role which the successful development of the economy plays in the struggle for the strengthening of socialist power. We know that the success of our policy is assessed by the broad strata of the people mainly according to the realistic conditions we create for their better and richer life.⁷

In the same speech, before any discussion of the future political activities of the Party, he enumerated the tasks the party set for the economy. For its fifth five-year plan, slated for 1971-5, he cited the raising of real wages, which, he added, “will make it possible to raise personal consumption still more,” and stressing the roles in this of producing more household appliances and automobiles.⁸ Husák had much good news to report at the fifteenth party congress, in 1976. As he noted,

We gave primary attention to the national economy as the basis for a consistent rise in the people’s living standard... The results achieved in economic and social policy make the past five years the most successful in the history of building Socialism in our state... Food consumption grew by 23 percent and the population’s nutrition improved [and] sales of industrial consumer goods rose by 37 percent.⁹

⁷ Gustáv Husák, “Report on the Activities of the Party and the Development of Society since the 13th Congress of the CPCz and Other Tasks of the Party,” *14th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Orbis, 1971), 28–29.

⁸ Husák, *Ibid.*, 34–35.

⁹ Husák, *Ibid.*, 21–22.

Although ambitious goals were set for the five-year plan for 1976–80, these were not met, and Husák was bound to ascribe these at the 1981 congress to the “difficult internal as well as external economic conditions,” and the “intensified discrimination against Czechoslovakia by the capitalist world.”¹⁰ Here, it is important to note, the word “consumption” appears only once in Husák’s overview of developments, despite its prominence in his earlier reports. By 1981, promises of a socialist cornucopia pouring out consumer goods had been replaced by stressing the *social* aspects of the tacit social contract: pensions, health insurance, child care, schools, and so on. By the next congress in 1986, Husák’s figures no longer referred to the most recent five-year plan, but the successes of the entire fifteen years since 1971, such that he could claim a “44 percent increase in personal consumption,” avoiding the fact that, even according to official figures, it had grown only 11 percent in the years 1981–85.¹¹

The promotion of, and later retreat from, consumerism can also be witnessed in numerous publications released by both government organs and scholarly institutes from the 1970s and 1980s. These show the emphasis on the material gains socialism brought and would bring, and the concomitant withdrawal of ideology from the regime’s understanding of itself. To give but one short example: in the early 1970s a unit was created to research the “socialist way of life,” quite tellingly as part of the Institute for Research on the Standard of Living. In the early and mid-1970s, the first section in each of their publications, whether public or for internal use only, was devoted to the standard of living, with much emphasis placed on the provision of consumer goods. Starting in the late 1970s, the emphasis turns to social benefits, but also to topics like the use of free time and so on. What is important is not just the de-emphasizing of consumerism, as the regime back-pedaled from a strategy that was rapidly turning against it, but the fact that in all of these cases, the kinds of socialist virtues such as solidarity, equity and the good of the whole always, *if they appeared at all*, come

¹⁰ Gustáv Husák, *Ibid.*, 20, 23.

¹¹ Nachtigal’s two variant methodologies have personal consumption growing by less than 2 percent, and slightly over 3 percent across these five years. See Nachtigal, 94–95.

at the end of the discussion, often appearing as afterthoughts.¹² From all of this, it is clear that the regime placed little stress on ideology, and that it knew that its consumerist offensive had collapsed into stagnation by the early 1980s.

Now I want to turn to the contours of consumption patterns in three areas: household appliances, consumer electronics, and automobiles. These categories were chosen because they are the types of consumer goods that really came into their own in the 1970s and 1980s in Europe as a whole, and are therefore of the most interest from a broader European perspective. What I have done is summarize ownership patterns in Table 1.

Table 1: Ownership of selected items, in percentage of households¹³

Item / Year	1970	1976	1979	1985
Electric Range	8.2	19.3	16.6	20.1
Gas Range	30.3	36.8	47.0	46.6
Refrigerator	70.1	87.0	91.8	96.7
Standard Clothes Washer	85.4	77.8	73.7	63.3
Automatic Clothes Washer	n/a	16.8	28.6	45.5
Black/White Television	83.8	91.7	91.8	80.9
Color TV	n/a	0.8	6.3	26.8
Automobile	19.0	37.1	44.3	47.0

As the table shows, there was a considerable increase in the percentage of households that owned these items, and, in many cases, the rate of

¹² There are far too many of these to cite, but two representative examples from the relevant periods are *Aktuální problémy socialistického způsobu života* (Bratislava: VÚŽÚ, 1977) and S. Valná. *Empirický výskum socialistického spôsobu života obyvateľstva ČSSR v etape výstavby rozvinutej socialistickej spoločnosti* (Bratislava: VÚŽÚ, 1982).

¹³ Internal Report of the Research Institute on Trade. Stanislav Kroc, *Historická ročenka vnútorného obchodu* (Prague: Výzkumný ústav obchodu, 1988), 45. The data on color televisions are for the Czech Socialist Republic only.

expansion slowed in the later years. Also, according to Table 2, while the percentage of Czechoslovak citizens who owned such items was increasing, the average age of these items was becoming quite large in several cases, dating the items back to the late 1970s.

Table 2: Average age of selected items in 1988¹⁴

Item	Age (in years)
Electric Range	11.5
Gas Range	9.1
Refrigerator	10.6
Standard Clothes Washer	12.5
Automatic Clothes Washer	6.9
B/W Television	10.5
Color TV (ČSR only)	4.2
Automobile	10.0

This indicates that the economy—and it was certainly much more of a shortage economy in the 1980s than it had been in the 1970s—was unable either to satisfy the desires of the population to own such items or to replace older versions of these items that had become obsolete or worn out. In addition to pointing out this growth in the ownership of these kinds of appliances and consumer electronics, I want to say a few words about shops, both because retail enterprises were the place where the regime's consumerist offensive met the public and to indicate that it was not just these items that were more readily available in the 1970s. First off, as further sign of the regime's commitment to building socialist consumerism, shop hours were extended into the evenings beginning on September 1, 1970. These longer hours, combined with the rapid growth in real incomes, led retail trade in constant prices to grow 26 percent between 1970 and 1975, with that of non-

¹⁴ Internal Report of the Research Institute on Trade. Eva Turkova, *Vybavenost československých domácností předměty dlouhodobé spotřeby v roce 1988* (Prague: Výzkumný ústav obchodu, 1990), příloha 12, list 1–2.

food items leading the way with a growth of 34 percent. Notably, and as you might expect, these dropped in the subsequent years, growing 7 and 6 percent respectively 1975/80 and 3 and 7 percent in 1980/85.¹⁵

The point is often made, though, that items, and particularly these kinds of durable goods, may have been produced, but that they were quite disproportionately soaked up by those in positions of power, especially members of the party. While I would not disagree with this for the 1950s, much of the 1960s, or much of the 1980s, I think that this distorts the picture for the 1970s in important ways. The evidence from my sociological surveys shows, as you can see from Table 3, that a greater proportion of party members did indeed have ownership of the kinds of consumer goods most prized.

Table 3: Ownership of selected items, in percent, based on membership in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia/Communist Party of Slovakia¹⁶

	1978			1984		
	Member with Function	Member without Function	Non-Member	Member with Function	Member without Function	Non-Member
B/W TV	96.4	95.9	94.2	85.4	87.6	87.6
Color TV	4.8	2.7	2.6	28.9	18.6	15.7
Stereo	13.6	11.0	10.0	39.5	29.9	29.3
Standard Clothes Washer	72.1	75.7	74.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Automatic Clothes Washer	27.9	21.3	21.3	53.2	41.5	36.7
Refrigerator	97.5	95.2	93.0	98.0	95.7	94.1
Freezer	3.0	1.4	2.0	19.2	14.9	14.4
Personal Automobile	60.7	44.0	42.8	67.5	50.5	44.5

¹⁵ See the internal report of the Research Institute for Trade, *Historické ročenka vnitřního obchodu* (Prague: výzkumný ústav obchodu, 1988), 35.

¹⁶ Šetření třídně sociální struktury obyvatelstva ČSSR 1978 and Šetření třídní a sociální struktury obyvatelstva ČSSR v roce 1984. All subsequent results, unless otherwise indicated, are in percent.

However, in most cases, mere party membership did not suffice to make a truly significant difference. I think that it is clear that one had to have a function—a higher position—within the party in order to capitalize. If you look at the comparison between those who had party membership, but were not functionaries, and those who were not members, the differences are not terribly great, and in almost every case smaller than the difference between ordinary party members and functionaries. Party membership, then, had its advantages, but in this regard they were slight, although they were greater in 1984 after the economy had slipped into stagnation and such goods were scarcer than they were in 1978. There are two further aspects that should be noted for all of these figures as well as those to come. Above all, ownership of these consumer goods, including automobiles, seems to be more generalized among adults than is indicated by these statistics. My data here are somewhat misleading because the surveys were administered to respondents 15 years of age and older, and many of the younger ones may no longer have lived at home and had not yet obtained such items. Finally, as regards televisions, there are interesting data from 1984. The totals of black-and-white and color add up to over 100 percent in each case, meaning that, on average, each household had more than one television, perhaps keeping one in the weekend houses that became ubiquitous at that time.

I want to be clear that I am not trying to paint communist Czechoslovakia as a consumer's paradise, but to show that there was considerable prosperity around in the 1970s, that it was fostered by the regime, and that it slowed markedly over the course of the late 1970s and early 1980s. How, then, did the Czech and Slovak people view this whole development? This, of course, is a tricky question to answer, but it is an important one. If the regime's strategy of trading consumption possibilities for political acquiescence was to succeed, then its subjects had to subjectively feel themselves to be better off. The deeply illegitimate regime of the immediate post-1968 period had to be successful both in luring the population into participating in what has been called "acquisitive dissent" in place of political dissent, and in fostering a sense that one was better off and would be increasingly better off in the future.¹⁷

¹⁷ The apt phrase "acquisitive dissent" is taken from Philip Hanson, *Advertising and Socialism* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 101.

One resource that has only started to be utilized in looking at Eastern European communist societies on a wide range of issues is public opinion data.¹⁸ Starting in the late 1950s, and expanding greatly as a result of the rebirth of sociology in the 1960s, Eastern European regimes began to condone and support survey research. While there were differing topical interests, and different ways of organizing this research, by the 1970s survey researching had become a part of social life across the region. As several scholars have pointed out, this activity was deeply paradoxical: it constituted an attempt to measure the public opinion that the rulers most wanted to suppress. While one may certainly argue that the regimes wanted to find out public opinion in order to better force it into conformity with the official line, there can be little doubt that the regimes of the post-Stalinist era became, over time, less interested in suppressing expression of public needs and concerns, and more interested in having such information at their disposal.¹⁹

Czechoslovakia was part of this larger regional trend—which one leading researcher called in 1984 “the renaissance of interest in public opinion”—although public opinion research had deeper roots in Czechoslovakia than elsewhere.²⁰ The first Institute for Public Opinion Research originated the year after the end of the Second World War. After the Communist Party had gained total power in February of 1948, it was silenced, and finally liquidated in 1950.²¹ In November of

¹⁸ In the case of the German Democratic Republic, for example, Heinz Niemann has published two studies relying on public opinion surveys, *Meinungsforschung in der DDR. Die geheimen Berichte des Institutes für Meinungsforschungen des Politbüro der SED* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1993) and *Hinterm Zaun. Politische Kultur und Meinungsforschung in der DDR—die geheimen Berichte an das Politbüro der SED* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1995).

¹⁹ See William A. Welsh, “Introduction: An Overview of the Status of Survey Research in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union,” in William A. Welsh, ed., *Survey Research and Public Attitudes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Pergamon, 1981), 8–9.

²⁰ Karel Rychtařík, cited from a speech he gave at a workshop attended by 42 interested parties ranging from professional sociologists to representatives of Czechoslovak Radio and Television, in Dušan Pavlů, “Příspěvek k rozvoji teorie veřejného mínění,” *Sociologický časopis* vol. 20 (1984): 556–67.

²¹ On the history of the first incarnation of official public opinion surveying, see the recollections of the institute’s Director, Čeněk Adamec, “Počátky výzkumu veřejného mínění u nás,” *Sociologický časopis* (1966) 1–15, 383–99

1965, however, the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to reopen the Institute. It began functioning in 1967 and its surveys provide a fascinating window into the final two decades of Communist Czechoslovakia.²²

Over the course of the years 1972 to 1989, the institute carried out 147 surveys in total, on topics ranging from the innocuous—tobacco consumption or cultural life—to the politically sensitive—opinions about the leading role of the party, those about the opposition centered around Charter 77, or, to a lesser extent, rates of listenership/viewership for Western media outlets—and including individual surveys on AIDS and the nuclear catastrophe at Chernobyl. Of this total, roughly half were concerned with issues relevant to this essay: the standard of living, the economy, the provision of goods and services, and so on. The regime was clearly interested in obtaining information about subjective perceptions of the economy's performance and the provision of material goods and the money with which to obtain them. After all, it was offering material goods in return for political acquiescence.

Before turning to a sample of the information the surveys themselves present, however, the question of the reliability of this information must be addressed briefly. I believe that there are strong reasons why, if carefully used and if accompanied by proper caveats, these surveys are worthy of a historian's trust. I believe this to be true for my materials, because the questions about goods are far less overtly political than many, many others that are asked, and large parts of the information can often be supported by other sources either internal to Czechoslovakia (census reports, etc.) or external to it (such as Radio Free Europe reports).

I only have space to discuss one aspect of consumer politics, but it is perhaps the most important one: the standard of living. The topic was central to public opinion research throughout the entire period, although the focus shifted along with the priorities dictated by the

and his "K počátkům výzkumu veřejného mínění," in Jiří Šubrt, ed. *Kapitoly ze sociologie veřejného mínění. Teorie a výzkum* (Prague: Karolinum, 1999), 75–94.

²² From 1972 until 1977, it was demoted to the level of a Kabinet (*Kabinet pro výzkum veřejného mínění*), although from 1978 onward it again had the status of an institute (*Ústav pro výzkum veřejného mínění*).

economic developments that broke the period into what I call High Normalization and Stagnant Normalization; with Normalization being the term that is used to talk about the entire period from the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 until the fall of communism in 1989. Interest in the individual's subjective perception of his or her standard of living, how it compared to the past, and what the expectations were for the future, were strongest during High Normalization, which lasted from 1970 to roughly 1977. During Stagnant Normalization, from roughly 1978 to 1989, other issues took priority. As the production of new goods stagnated, the regime became increasingly interested in how Czechoslovaks perceived the supply and quality of the products on offer.

Public opinion research on subjective accounts of the Czechoslovak standard of living began within months after the August 1968 invasion, as we can see in Tables 4 and 5.²³

Table 4 (1968): "Do you have the feeling that you and your family could afford, on your income, more, the same, or less than last year (e.g., in buying goods, visiting cultural attractions, traveling, etc.)?"

	More	About the same	Less	Cannot judge
CSSR	11	46	41	2
CSR	9	44	45	2
SSR	17	52	29	2

While incomes rose over the year of the Prague Spring, so did prices, leading many to perceive an erosion of their purchasing power. While a slim plurality believed that their incomes bought roughly the same amount of goods in 1968 as they had in 1967, over two-fifths held it bought less, while only 11 percent replied that it bought more, with those in Slovakia feeling significantly less slighted. Views of the future were slightly less pessimistic, although those expecting a fall in their standard of living still edged out those who expected a rise, with those in the Slovak Socialist Republic being the more optimistic.

²³ Here and below, CSSR stands for Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, CSR the Czech Socialist Republic, and SSR the Slovak Socialist Republic.

*Table 5 (1968): "Generally speaking, would you say that your standard of living will rise, fall, or remain the same?"*²⁴

	Rise	Fall	Remain the same
CSSR	22	24	54
CSR	18	28	54
SSR	30	14	56

These results stand in sharp contrast to those presented in Tables 6 and 7. By November of 1970, a majority of respondents were able to answer that they were satisfied with their standard of living, and the number of those who expected their standard of living to rise was more than double the number of those who expected it to fall.²⁵

Table 6 (1970): "When you consider your current standard of living, are you satisfied?"

	CSSR	CSR	SSR
I am satisfied	19	20	17
I am fairly satisfied	36	34	42
I cannot decide	15	16	15
I am fairly dissatisfied	21	22	19
I am dissatisfied	9	9	8

It seems that the economic measures the regime was implementing were having the desired effect. Regardless of the undoubtedly widespread feelings of *political* hopelessness and disaffection, Czechoslovaks responded increasingly positively when asked about their own standards of living, just as they showed strong optimism about the economy as a whole by 1971, as we can see from Table 8.

²⁴ While the period is undefined in the question, one can safely believe that respondents would take it as meaning "in 1969," since the two preceding questions referred specifically to that year.

²⁵ Note that the differences between the republics had also narrowed considerably by this time.

Table 7 (1970): “Do you expect, that in the foreseeable future (perhaps the next three to five years) your standard of living will become better or worse?”

	CSSR	CSR	SSR
Be markedly better	6	5	10
Be somewhat better	32	30	36
Remain about the same	40	43	33
Somewhat worsen	15	16	12
Markedly worsen	2	2	1
DK	5	4	7

Table 8: “The economic situation of the CSSR in the next year will...”

	Improve	Remain the same	Decline
Oct. 1969	20	40	33
Nov. 1970	54	23	11
Nov. 1971	68	15	4

This trend continued in the following years, as Czechs and Slovaks were asked to assess the bounty of their Christmas tables and the accompanying presents and increasingly asked to view their standard of living against that of those around them.²⁶ It can also be seen in the satisfaction with the supplies of goods presented in Table 9.

As late as 1977, satisfaction with a number of the components of the standard of living remained high: 89 percent were satisfied with the prepared meals served at workplaces (*stravování*), 82 percent with clothing, 72 and 74 percent with their housing and its furnishings, respectively, and 56 percent with culture and recreation. The least satisfaction was expressed with transportation (46 percent satisfied, 49

²⁶ On the Christmas tables see 72-03: n.p. (číselník question 37), and compare it with the data from 1969 in Pool, 11. On relational views of one's own standard of living, see 71-14: 16-9 and 74-03/1: 15.

percent dissatisfied) and the service sector as it related to households and the family, where only 29 percent expressed satisfaction, and 50 percent dissatisfaction. While satisfaction was still generally high, the percentages represented only a small shift from results obtained in 1974, indicating that gains had slowed.²⁷

Table 9: Consumer satisfaction with supplies of goods

Year	On the whole satisfactory	Not entirely satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Don't know
1970	6	42	51	1
1973	55	39	4	2
1975	43	47	8	2
1977	59	28	8	5

By the mid-1980s, the public's mood reflected the stagnation into which the economy had fallen, as we can see from Tables 10 to 12. Less than half of the respondents held that their standard of living had become better over the first half of the decade, while almost a quarter testified to a decline.²⁸ Further, in a survey of twelve components of the standard of living, a plurality in each category responded that their position had remained the same over the past five years, and an absolute majority held this position in over half of them. Similarly, in only five of the categories—housing, income, social security, workplace meals, and clothing—did those who declared that their position had bettered exceed that of those who felt that it had worsened by more than 10 percent.

The data were, if anything, less optimistic for the future than they were for the past, and the results were even worse than those obtained in 1970. In 1970, however, the tide was turning to optimism. By 1984, the tide was turning the other way, and more experienced Praguers and older Czechoslovaks seemed to know it.

²⁷ 77-03: 27.

²⁸ 84-06, cited in 89-03: 11. See table 11b.

Table 10 (1984): "The assessment of individual components of the standard of living from the viewpoint of developments over the past five years"

	Bettered	Remained the same	Worsened
Housing	33	59	7
Financial income	39	38	21
Social security	25	56	8
Prepared meals	31	53	15
Clothing	32	49	17
Health care	22	64	12
Cultural life	26	52	17
Recreation	28	47	19
Further study	19	47	11
Sports	20	47	14
Environment in one's place of residence	28	46	24
Transportation	20	56	19
Household services	17	52	20

Table 11 (1984): "Respondent's ideas of the development of their own standard of living over the next five years"

	CSSR		CSR		SSR	
	1970	1985	1970	1985	1970	1985
Better	38	34	35	30	46	42
Remain the same	40	35	43	38	33	30
Worsen	17	23	18	25	13	19
DK	5	8	4	7	7	9

While 34 percent of all respondents held that they anticipated that their own standard of living would be better over the subsequent five years, and 23 percent that it would worsen, pessimists outnumbered

optimists in this regard by 10 percent among those aged 45 to 59, and by 2 percent among residents of the capital. In this case, the youth showed the greatest optimism, with those foreseeing a rise in their standard of living outnumbering those who saw a decline 64 to 13 percent, while those over 59 years of age—concerned about their pensions and the provision of social services—were at the opposite end of the spectrum: 45 percent foresaw a decline, while only 7 percent saw their own living standard rising.²⁹

Table 12 (1984): “Respondent’s ideas of the development of their own standard of living over the next five years” (by selected factors)

	Age 15–29	Age 30–44	Age 45–59	Age 60+	Prague	Bratislava
Better	64	44	21	7	28	45
Remain the same	23	38	48	48	34	26
Worsen	13	18	31	45	30	15

Table 13 (1989): “The assessment of the standard of living in Czechoslovakia for the periods 1980–1985 and 1985–1989”

	1980–1985	1985–1989
Bettered	46	27
Stayed the same	29	31
Worsened	22	36
DK	3	4

By the final years of communist Czechoslovakia, the indicators had turned decidedly against the regime in its quest to provide a better standard of living to the population. This is reflected in Tables 13 to 15. By 1989, only 29 percent of respondents held that the standard

²⁹ Here again, the optimism of those in Slovakia can be seen. Optimists outnumbered pessimists 42 percent to 19 percent across the republic, and, in Bratislava, by 45 percent to 15 percent.

of living in Czechoslovakia had risen over the previous five years (as opposed to 46 percent in 1985), while 36 percent held that it had fallen (22 percent in 1985). Although still witnessing erosion, figures were better when respondents were asked about their own experiences.

Table 14 (1989): "When you think about the period roughly five years ago and compare your own standard of living with today, would you say that your standard of living..."

	1985	1989
Bettered	44	38
Stayed the same	31	32
Worsened	23	29
DK	2	1

To this question, 38 percent replied that their living standard had improved over the past five years (it had been 44 percent in 1985), and 29 percent that it had declined (23 percent in 1985). Optimistic views of the future were also in decline, as respondents' beliefs in their future standards of living indicated.

Table 15 (1989): "Respondents' ideas about the development of their own standard of living in the next five years"

	1985	1989
Will be better	43	32
Will stay the same	35	36
Will worsen	23	25
DK	8	7

Overall, only 32 percent believed their living standard would improve over the subsequent five years, while one-fourth foresaw a decline. While residents of Prague continued their decline into pessimism, with only 22 percent believing in a rise, 37 percent forecast a decline, and

38 percent predicted stability.³⁰ All of these late figures should be taken as indicative of a trend only. It is very likely that the public's views were affected by the external political changes already beginning. Here, the sense of political powerlessness may have been expressed through views of the standard of living. This would explain why views of society's living standard were more critical than assessments of one's own, for if the state is seen as faltering economically this would be reflected in the opinion polls, while one's own position can still be seen in a more positive light.

Such critical views were expressed not only regarding the standard of living generally, but against most of its components as well, as we find in the final set of tables. Those holding positive assessments of developments from 1985–1989 in fifteen different sectors outnumbered those with negative ones by 10 percent or more only in housing and social security, while negative assessments outdistanced positive ones by more than 10 percent in six categories, with markedly poor results in non-foodstuffs, clothing and the environment.

Table 16 (1989): "The assessment of selected components of the standard of living from the viewpoint of developments in the period 1985–1989"

	Bettered	Remained the same	Worsened
Financial income	28	45	24
Housing	25	65	9
Prepared meals, etc.	20	65	14
Health care	12	68	18
Social security	21	59	11
Food purchases	13	56	29
Non-food purchases	8	42	46
Clothing	14	45	40
Services	10	58	20
Transportation	13	60	24

³⁰ 89-03:17.

	Bettered	Remained the same	Worsened
Environment	13	46	39
Recreation	21	50	23
Cultural life	20	58	18
Sporting life	14	52	17
Further education	16	51	8

These results were mirrored in respondents' declarations of their satisfaction or, more likely, dissatisfaction in the same categories.

Table 17 (1989): "Citizens' current satisfaction with selected components of the standard of living"

	Satisfied	Sometimes satisfied, sometimes dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Financial income	20	33	43
Housing	57	28	14
Prepared meals, etc.	38	47	13
Health care	28	50	21
Social security	28	42	17
Food purchases	17	53	28
Non-food purchases	9	41	47
Clothing	13	41	45
Services	11	47	30
Transportation	21	44	31
Environment	22	31	46
Recreation	28	40	26
Cultural life	29	44	23
Sporting life	28	36	17
Further education	32	26	10

the 1960s, what one did for a living became less important, while what kind of person one was became more important. Visible markers of self-expression and group identity became an important way of relating this information, and for understanding other individuals. Certainly, modes of dress, choices of hairstyles and so on, as conscious expressions of identity predate this, but the rise of new forms of leisure activity that came with the gradual shortening of the work week, and the more expansive chronological definitions of what constituted the youth, heightened the importance of self-definition through consumption.

It was at this precise time that East-Central Europe made its turn toward consumerism. Just as in the West, across the 1970s and 1980s, working weeks became shorter and people, especially younger and savvier urbanites, began to explore their identities through consumption. The relationship between identity and consumption was reinforced by détente and the increased availability of Western media (and even shopping catalogues in some places, such as former Yugoslavia), but had solid domestic roots in the push toward consumerism that the regimes' legitimization choices brought. The failure to understand this led observers on both the political left and the political right to misjudge East-Central Europeans' considerable, although unwitting, preparation for the changes that occurred. Many of those on the right believed that the roughly forty-five years of state socialism meant that the advent of attitudes suitable to market capitalism and advanced Western consumer society would take a generation to inculcate. Similarly, those on the political left wanted the East to find a "third way" and worried deeply about the encroachment of precisely the kind of empty, materialist and consumption-driven society that they believed had morally damaged the West. Clearly, the parallel but certainly not identical developments in consumption and consumer attitudes that occurred in Eastern and Western Europe provide some avenues for exploration regarding "Europeanizing" the history of the European twentieth century. Now that the state socialist regimes of Eastern Europe have receded into people's memories, we might be wise to look for strands of developments in the East that can help us understand what made Europe "European" in the twentieth century.

IOAN T. MORAR and DAVID MORAR

*The Second Hat:
Romanian Mass Media from Party
Loudspeaker to the Voice of the
Oligarchs*

The state of affairs of Romanian journalism can be best expressed by way of a real-life anecdote, which, incidentally, was transformed into a motion picture.¹ Of course reality mixes with fiction. In fact, one could easily find enough similarities between this story and Milan Kundera's tale from the *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, where one individual (Vladimir Clementis, a prominent member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, who was included in the Slansky show trial and executed in 1952) is taken out of photos and history books, on account of being a traitor. The only remaining proof of his existence is the hat he gave to his war buddy (Klement Gottwald, the first secretary of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia), when they were addressing the crowds from a balcony.

The story we are about to tell is also about a hat, although in a different setting. The official photo for the visit of France's president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, to Romania, in 1979, was taken upon his arrival and was sent to Agerpress, the National Press Agency. There, after a thorough examination, they realized that the French president wore his hat on his head while Nicolae Ceaușescu held his hat in one hand. Thinking this could potentially reveal some type of subservience of the Romanian communist leader to his French counterpart, the people responsible for

¹ The anecdote was transformed into a movie plot by Romanian director Cristian Mungiu, who, along with four other directors, put together a project focusing on the communist period, entitled "Tales from the Golden Age." The segment we are referring to bears the name "The Legend of the Official Visit."

printing the photo decided to alter this inconvenient reality. They cut out another hat from a different photo, and in a prehistoric-kind of Photoshop pasted it onto the Romanian dictator's head. The end result was unexpected, as the photo printed in the newspaper showed Nicolae Ceaușescu with one hat on his head and another in his hand. The second hat had been there the whole time, but the overzealous comrades were only paying attention to the head. To paraphrase Paul Levine, Ceaușescu's, or, for that matter, Clementis' hats do hold lessons for us today.² They are, in our case, poignant metaphors for the state of Romanian mass media, one that has a very visible second hat, forcefully pasted on by way of political or economic interest or by the legacies of a murky communist past.

One cannot speak about the past twenty years in Romanian journalism without touching upon pre-December 1989 mass media and the mechanisms that made it into an ideological loudspeaker, a means for propaganda, under the total control of the Party. During the first part of his rule, Ceaușescu played a double game with the West, and completely disbanded the main institution of censorship. The Committee for Newspapers and Publications (*Comisia pentru Presă și Tipărituri*) was formally closed in 1977, its employees fired, and the decision was publicized to the whole world as a sign of democratization. It was to be the ultimate proof that the regime was promoting freedom of expression, advertising the image of Ceaușescu as a maverick, somebody the West could count on. Ironically though, censorship on media and culture only got worse. After the institution was abolished, the act of censorship itself was carried out not only by the media section of the party, but also by the editors of each publication. Censorship filters multiplied and were stacked on top of each other, making the abolishment of censorship the best thing to ever happen to censorship. Revolutionary vigilance was activated and heightened, making censorship much more efficient.³

As a demonstration of the above-described process, Romania's collective memory contains the case of a poet hired by the Censorship

² See Paul Levine, "The Dean's December: Between the Observatory and the Crematorium," in Gerhard Bach, ed., *Saul Bellow at Seventy-Five. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1991), 126.

³ For more details about the dynamics of censorship in the post-1977 years see Vladimir Tismaneanu et al., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România—Raport Final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 404–6.

Division right before it was disbanded. The poet sent a few of his poems to a magazine for publication. When the page with his poems reached his own desk at the Censorship Division of the magazine, he cut some verses and even took out one poem on the suspicion of subversive language. The poet saw things one way; the censor another. This story highlights a typical product of dictatorships—doublethink. Dual thinking led to a parallel discourse. On one side there was the official discourse, a *langue de bois*⁴ used at public occasions, at work, in the media, in the newspapers. On the other side, there existed a hidden discourse, only exhibited in safe environments, with trusted friends, or at home. The official christening in the area of doublethink was usually during childhood, when one would receive the pioneer's tie (part of the youth organization's uniform) and one would dive into the *langue de bois*. In the meantime, at home, the same individual had a different discourse, for reality was different, sad and harsh, fueled by one's daily life in a communist dictatorship. The media was the number one tool in perpetuating this dual thinking, in widening the distance between the hidden thoughts of ordinary Romanians and the *langue de bois*.

Under these circumstances, a good journalist was one that was able to quarantine normal thinking in order to preserve official discourse. S/he was a journalist, who, despite knowledge of what was real or not, wrote against the truth with dexterity, ignoring implications at any level of conscience. The "new man," envisioned by Ceaușescu, was starting to take shape in the newspapers, in a fake world with highly manufactured discourse. Moreover, the journalist was responsible for the socialist education of this "new man." Of course, one ought not make general accusations; not all journalists were equally subservient to the regime. There were indeed articles that did not make it past censorship. There were plenty of cases of journalists that sought salvation abroad, criticizing the Ceaușescu regime,⁵ or of journalists that stayed

⁴ See the classical study of Françoise Thom, *Newspeak: The Language of Soviet Communism*, trans. Ken Connelly (London: Claridge Press, 1989).

⁵ One example is Ioana Măgură, who worked for the National Broadcasting Company until 1970 when she fled from Romania and began working for Radio Free Europe in Munich. She married Noel Bernard, one of the directors of the Romanian section of RFE. For more details see Ioana Măgură Bernard, *Directorul postului nostru de radio* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007).

behind but tried to broadcast the harsh truths and the abuse that was taking place in the socialist bloc across the Iron Curtain.

In the ranks of Romanian journalists there was a sort of latent resistance, which made journalism, after December 22, 1989, the first manifestation of freedom. Romania was, by all accounts, the first country to broadcast the Revolution live on television. The same anchormen that had praised Ceaușescu before he fled were now, during the days of the Revolution, speaking about the crimes of communism, the wrongdoings of the regime, and the abuses of the former dictator. The same anchormen that, in the first night of their freedom, did not even have time to change their neckties! They came to work in the morning of December 22 as communist journalists and went home as free journalists in a free country. They wrote about the fall of Ceaușescu on the same typewriters they used to write his praises. And in the newsrooms, just the same, with the same people at the same offices, new formulas for a free press were sought. One of the most insightful analysts of Romanian mass media remarked that “the first two months following the collapse of Communism, the Romanian media became an experiment in public access media and an avenue of individual and national catharsis.”⁶ Indeed, the fall of the communist regime brought about the promise of independent journalism as a building block of the new democratic order. But the realities of the post-authoritarian transition would soon hit a society that had been deprived of a voice and the culture of dialogue for so many years.

The first debate, both formal and informal, in post-December 22 Romanian newsrooms was about the outcome of the Revolution: did it oust Ceaușescu’s dictatorship, or did it oust communism as a whole? This was the first schism of the free Romanian mass media, as well as of public opinion. It was said that in December 1989, Romania had had a Revolution doubled by a *coup d’état*. Those who had fought against communism were participants of the Revolution, whereas those who had only wanted to oust Ceaușescu were portrayed as supporters

⁶ Peter Gross, “Media in the First Post-Communist Decade,” in Henry F. Carey, ed., *Romania since 1989*, with a forward by Norman Manea (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 195. See also Peter Gross and Mihai Coman, *Media and Journalism in Romania*, European Journalism Review Series (Berlin: Vistas Verlag, 2006).

of the coup. The schism caused the official communist mass media to split into two parties.⁷ One side became loyal to the new power, which had been accused of confiscating the revolution, while the other side of the press started to campaign for a real democracy.⁸ The old publications with new titles were not the only important actors in the Romanian press. A plethora of new publications staffed by people outside of the communist mass media popped up, through private initiatives, taking the side of the democratic press. They opposed the publications that were loyal to the National Salvation Front (NSF), the new post-communist power.

Thus, during the first years of transition to democracy, the written press (at the time the most relevant form of mass media, as there were no private television stations) was split into two camps: the independent newspapers and those under NSF control. The old party mass media became an ideological contractor for the new power. And because the new power, built around Ion Iliescu, realized the dangers of having an independent press, the latter became the main target of the NSF along with non-communist and non-nationalist political parties. Newspapers subservient to the NSF would frequently launch attacks on old journalists that had escaped the communist mindset, calling them “sold-outs to the foreigners” or “betrayers of our country.” An interesting fact is that these expressions were a toned-down version of the accusations made by Ceaușescu against the revolutionaries in Timișoara, who were called traitors, unpatriotic, puppets in the hands of foreign services. Thus, during the first years of transition, this antinomy between the obedient and the independent media shaped the Romanian media. Such a bipolar set-up was evident not only in the national press, but also in the local media, where the former newspapers of the party county committees became part of the NSF media networks. But even here, in the local press, independent publications cropped up, created either by journalists that converted to

⁷ See Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Despre 1989. Naufragiul utopiei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010).

⁸ For more details on the different versions of the Romanian Revolution that appeared in the first decade of post-communism see Peter Siani-Davies's chapter “The Myths and Realities of the Revolution” in his *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

democratic values,⁹ or by private investors who saw the investment in mass media as a twofold opportunity. On the one side it was an economic opportunity, while on the other it became an outlet for the expression of the population's anti-communist views.

The first ten years of post-revolutionary, post-communist mass media draw an interesting picture, where the old, professional journalists were mixed together with new journalists armed with more enthusiasm than writing talent, recruited off the barricades of the first free political debates. Nevertheless, the former group did include cases of conversion to democratic values, of abandoning doublethink. The latter also counted in its ranks younger journalists who more often than not deserted from norms of deontological behavior. One of the possible explanations for this dynamic among journalists is, without a doubt, the collaboration with the communist secret police—the *Securitate*. Though we will not dwell extensively on the topic, it is difficult to understand the landscape of past and present Romanian mass media without a brief discussion of it.¹⁰ Obviously, not all journalists that were active before 1989 collaborated with the *Securitate*, and paradoxically, not all the journalists that started working after 1989 were innocent.

During the communist regime, all newsrooms had, outside of the overwhelming influence of the party structure, a parallel system of maintaining control: informants for the secret police. Why would a state entity, as all publications were before 1989, need to be secretly controlled by another state entity, the *Securitate*? The explanation for such a double-bind control over mass media came from a larger explanation of communist dictatorship.¹¹ There were journalists that system-

⁹ One could say that this was not actually a conversion, but a recalibration of principles and beliefs, as they shed their blinds and started reporting the truth as opposed to the official version of the truth.

¹⁰ For details on the role and functioning of the *Securitate* during Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule see Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (London: Hurst, 1995).

¹¹ For example, Suskos showed that in Hungary there was a special government agency that kept secret files on every journalist. The author underlined that “these files were consulted by agents of the political police before members of the media *nomenklatura* and rank-and-file journalists were nominated or appointed to their posts.” See Miklós Sükösd, “Democratic Transformation and the Mass Media in Hungary: From Stalinism to

atically denounced their colleagues solely due to of being overzealous, or on the basis of their desire to be promoted, or, simply, out of professional envy. Others became informants after they were blackmailed by the secret police. Moreover, if a journalist was “unlucky” to have a relative abroad or one who emigrated in the West, s/he would become increasingly vulnerable to heinous negotiation: “You either sign up to collaborate, or you’re out of a job.” There were, however, quite a few cases of journalists that rejected such blackmail.

On the one hand, from the ranks of the majority that did succumb to blackmail were recruited the journalists that, after 1989, became beacons of the independent press. In these cases, for those who chose to adopt democratic values, it was a sort of revenge against the old system, against the humiliations they had been subjected to by the communist secret service. It could be decoded as a form of liberation from the constraints of living a dark life in the shadows of a labyrinth of secret police files. On the other hand, quite a few younger journalists, who had never worked in a communist newsroom, did collaborate with the *Securitate*. They were informants who had “told on” their colleagues, their relatives, their acquaintances and their friends. A notorious case is that of a current media mogul, Dan Voiculescu, who was, as the courts decided irrevocably and definitively, a very productive informant in his workplace, a foreign commerce office; all this while, allegedly, being an officer in the *Securitate*.

A lot of the former informants believed that the events of December 1989 erased any trace, consequence, or legacy of their collaboration with the secret police. The developments in later years demonstrated that this was not so. Their problematic past could not be erased and the liaison officers did not completely vanish in the black hole of the Revolution. Regrouping, usually in the employment of former officers of the *Securitate* turned businessmen or influential politicians, liaison officers managed, in most cases, to rekindle their ties with the informants, to threaten them with being uncovered and with public embarrassment. In other words, the old mechanism of blackmail proved quite useful in the dynamics of post-communist

democratic Consolidation,” in Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan, eds., *Democracy and the Media. A Comparative Perspective* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 124.

Romanian journalism. That is why, for the reader unaccustomed with the behind-the-scenes dealings of local mass media, the inconsistencies in the attitude of some writers, the ways in which they end up suddenly supporting the complete opposite of their former beliefs, are inexplicable. From this great pool of journalists “recovered” by the former *Securitate* officers, a lot of the personnel of the mass media oligarchs’ future conglomerates were recruited. In this manner, the past that they were not able to escape continues to dictate their deformed future, with the knowledge that prestige and authority last only as long as their patrons are able to dictate the weather of Romanian politics and business.¹²

Another important aspect needs to be underlined here: the successive phases of post-communist economic downturns, which greatly affected newspapers that were unable to live off subscriptions and sales any longer.¹³ This was happening while the ad market was still young and immature. Moreover, funds for publicity expenses were often insufficient and therefore directed mainly to television stations.¹⁴ This was happening at a time when governmental advertisement emerged as the savior of newspapers. State institutions and agencies started buying ad space in magazines and newspapers. Of course, this was not done in a transparent manner; it was based on loyalty to those parties that ran the country.¹⁵ The government would buy ads in return for silence, for articles of praise, and most importantly, for taking out all the subjects that were taboo, for instance all the new

¹² On the politics of the access to the files of the former secret police in Romania see Lavinia Stan’s chapter on Romania in Lavinia Stan, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. Reckoning with the Communist Past* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 128–51.

¹³ This came as a natural effect of less money in the pockets of regular citizens, which lead to a reassessment of daily expenses, and of course, newspapers were the first to go.

¹⁴ Romania’s ad market was something that did not properly shape up before 1989. Afterwards, ad campaigns were not properly planned for, so there was a significant amount of learning by doing, trial and error.

¹⁵ The notion of governmental advertising was strange because the ads were mostly promoting government services, agencies, or products that either had a monopoly or were not subject to the general public actively interacting or deciding to do business with them.

information about corruption.¹⁶ However, the reality of this process was ever more subtler. The media was allowed to denounce corruption, as a bad habit, as a rotten phenomenon, but they were forbidden to give names of those that were corrupt. And so the idea was born of a corruption without the corrupt. Corruption did affect society, economy, and democracy, but those involved in it were among the creditors of the booming ad-economy of Romanian mass media, so their names were never mentioned.¹⁷

The practice of buying advertisements in exchange for silence about shady governmental dealings branched out into the private sector. Thus, the publication of articles that denounced the practices of a certain firm stopped once big money poured into the advertisement section of the mass media outlet. Private companies took initiative and the fact that their actions were blatant to anybody that had a larger attention span did not faze them at all. The same paper that promised a full exposé on a subject would then run full-page ads, or advertorials, in its place. Again, this should not be seen as a generalization, but as a description of a large portion of the written press. To make matters worse, journalists themselves caught the bug and decided that it would be pointless to have to wait for the company to come up with ad money. They simply went to those involved and asked for money in exchange for silence. In this manner, besides the independent press and the obedient press, a third type emerged, the blackmail press. The efficiency of this type of “journalism” can be measured through the sumptuous villas, the top-of-the-line cars and the obscenely large bank accounts of former journalists, now nationally famous for their practices. Of course, the devil’s advocate could say that this type of “journalism” helped Romanian society, because not all blackmail attempts were successful. In fact, the motto of these blackmailers was: any unsuccessful blackmail attempt can be turned into a great

¹⁶ A good number of publications barely survived very trying times through government money, while making their editors-in-chief or editorial directors wealthy in the process.

¹⁷ The idea of corruption was hard to deny, as its effects were very visible, and the population’s discontent was evident, so corruption had to be brought up, somehow, sweetened, by ad money from the government.

piece of investigative journalism.¹⁸ However beneficial failed black-mail was, there can be no denying that this was a highly toxic environment for Romanian businesses and most importantly Romanian mass media. After more than a decade of “free” journalism a sort of mutual dependence developed between journalism and politics: “The media remained dependent on political entities and politicians because they were so politicized and partisan; in turn, political parties and politicians have increased their courting of the media, not certain when, and to what extent, they could control or influence them.”¹⁹

The mechanism of buying “press immunity” caught on for the category of politicians and businessmen in trouble with the law. Some of the freshly-minted Romanian millionaires had enough capital to buy immunity by the piece. For this purpose, they initially negotiated with and invested resources in different publications, multiple people, and numerous demands. Soon enough they decided to go straight to the producer, the newspapers, which they subsequently bought. This was the setting stage of the current state of Romanian journalism, where a series of newspapers and magazines entered the portfolio of the magnates, who became media oligarchs (*moguli*). Bought or created, the new press organizations became the immunity guarantee for the empires of the oligarchs. After having purchased their immunity, these businessmen realized they had a fantastic source of power in their hands. Their political preferences, whatever they were at any particular time, benefited from excellent media platforms that could influence public opinion with the purpose of officializing these businessmen’s strategic interests. From this rather twisted vantage point, Romania mass media did indeed become agenda setters.

One somewhat humorous example speaks volumes about the outlook of the new situation in Romanian mass media. Two businessmen, brothers, close to former president Ion Iliescu (at least until the early 2000s), who were major producers of low-cost, low-quality alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, realized that they were paying

¹⁸ The amount of investigations that were stopped through appealing to the person in question and demanding money will probably never be known, but it is widely believed that what actually went to press was only a small percentage of the total.

¹⁹ Gross, “Media in the First Post-Communist Decade,” 206.

millions of Euros buying ad space for TV and newspapers, money that they would have obviously preferred to keep for themselves. So, in a stroke of managerial genius, they came up with the best plan: the millions spent on advertisements would go into making a TV station. In this way, the money they paid for ads would find its way back into their pockets, because they would only advertise on their own channel, thus requiring little other investment and guaranteed success. The only problem was that after a year, sales for their products drastically went down. Their TV station had zero ratings and they had to revert back to buying ads on other stations. The situation resembled the story of the Baron of Munchausen who decided to pull his own hair to get himself out of a swamp.

A good case study of the tribulations of Romanian journalism is that of the main party newspaper, its official loudspeaker, *Scînteia* ("The Spark"), the press arm of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Romania. Between December 16 and 21, 1989, *Scînteia* published ample articles condemning the "hooligans" in Timișoara. After Ceaușescu's flight became a certainty and the revolutionaries took control of the situation across the country, the first edition of the newspaper published in a free country was entitled *Scînteia Poporului* (The Spark of the People).²⁰ Afterwards, with a somewhat Soviet resonance, the newspaper became *Adevărul*, Romanian for Pravda. It was intended to send a subliminal message of going into Perestroika rather than democracy. It now became the loudspeaker of "original democracy," to use Ion Iliescu's formula, then head of the NSF and the first President of Romania. *Adevărul* was, for some years, the message bearer of Ion Iliescu and the NSF, writing against the historic parties, the monarchy, and even against former Romanian dissidents. It played all the parts it was given by those in power, who had already been accused of overturning the Revolution. It was, in fact, a continuation of the newspaper's former role only with different masters: the Romanian Communist Party had been replaced by the NSF.

²⁰ In line with the revolution vs. coup d'état strand of thought, it could be argued that the name change was, in fact, a cautious first choice, making use of former "party speak," ambiguous enough, if communism were to make a come-back under a different leader.

When it became clear that privatization was not a monster that would gobble up the country, *Adevărul* decided to privatize through selling stocks to employees, the MEBO method (in short, the newspaper was bought by its own employees). In the “governmental advertisement for cover-ups”-stage, *Adevărul* was the largest beneficiary of state money, most of the ad revenues going through front-companies owned by some of *Adevărul*’s bosses. In this way, some of the journalists at *Adevărul* became richer than others and bought out, at very low prices, the rest of the stocks. Offering media protection to businessmen made some bosses at *Adevărul* even richer. The director at the time, Dumitru Tinu, partnered up with a controversial businessman, and he magically appeared on the board of the J. W. Marriott company branch in Romania. At this time, the actual owner of the newspaper was that particular businessman, whose shady dealings were never mentioned in the newspaper, while he was heavily scrutinized by the rest of the Romanian mass media. The untimely and mysterious death of Tinu in a car crash further complicated the status of ownership of *Adevărul*. Thus, after the departure of a large part of the editorial team, the newspaper was up for sale and a liberal businessman, allegedly the richest man in Romania, Dinu Patriciu, bought it. The leftist stance of the newspaper evaporated and in its place the liberal doctrine advocated by Patriciu set up shop. The newspaper is now the place where Dinu Patriciu publishes his op-eds, and obviously, the paper curtain behind which Patriciu is enjoying his immunity. Not only are stories about Patriciu’s shady oil refinery dealings not brought up, but the façade of being the “benefactor” for esteemed political and social commentators, nicely intertwined with that of having a charitable foundation in his name, means that whenever any kind of charges are brought up against him, he can use them to vouch for his reputation in society.

Our case study would not be complete if we would not index a few other publications that have undergone similar transformations but at a different scale. *The Youth Spark* (*Scînteia Tineretului*), the younger brother to the main party newspaper *Scînteia* (*The Spark*), was the organ of the Central Committee of the UTC (Union of Communist Youth). During the first days after the Revolution, *Scînteia Tineretului* morphed into *The Free Youth* (*Tineretul Liber*). In contrast to its “senior” counterpart, *Adevărul* (formerly *Scînteia*), *Tineretul Liber* was not particularly zealous in defending the new, “revolutionary” power. It

did function on the basis of its pre-1989 administrative structure until a “collective privatization” changed the ownership. The new owner was businessman George Pădure. *Tineretul Liber* never had a strong impact, illustrating, in fact, its status from the communist period, that is, a loudspeaker of the regime’s Potemkin-like vision of the Romanian youth. Another explanation for the short life of this newspaper in the early post-communist years is its ambiguous position in relation to the political dominance of the National Salvation Front. Trying to show relative balance and independence, *Tineretul Liber* headed for bankruptcy. This happened almost at the same time as George Pădure’s small media-empire was collapsing. Pădure did not become an oligarch like Dan Voiculescu or Dinu Patriciu. Instead he chose to go into politics and served one term as the mayor of one of Bucharest’s districts.

Particularly because of its atypical nature, the surprising evolution of the newspaper *Cotidianul* (*The Daily*) also deserves a brief review. A mass media outlet that was not connected in any way with the communist regime, *Cotidianul* was the project of politician Ion Rațiu, who returned to Romania from Great Britain after the Revolution where he played an important role in the Romanian diaspora. During his time abroad he was able to amass a significant fortune. This economic status allowed him to found and finance a newspaper based on the British daily model. In fact, the newsroom, filled with journalists with no obvious connection to the communist party or the *Securitate* and with enthusiastic youngsters, benefited from a training session with British journalists. Additionally, the newspaper also owned its own modern printing house. Despite Ion Rațiu’s ownership, the newspaper never became the loudspeaker of his party—PNTCD (The National Peasant Christian Democrat Party). This increased its credibility. The first years of the newspaper were marked by internal newsroom rivalries and drama. Despite the founder’s good faith, his choices of leadership and direction in the evolution of the newspaper were not the most fortunate. Confronted with large personnel fluctuations, *Cotidianul* started lagging behind in news accuracy, style, and consequently in its impact. After the passing of Ion Rațiu, there were several attempts to revitalize the newspaper, but none proved successful. After a few years, *Cotidianul* became more of a journalistic memory; it collapsed to a very low print-run. Even so, the franchise *Cotidianul*, without an early post-communist smear or a burdensome communist past, remained attrac-

tive for future investors. Therefore, in the early 2000s, the founding editors of *Academia Cașavencu*, (including one of the co-authors of the current paper) at the time a highly influential satirical weekly, saw potential in re-launching it. They got in touch with Rașiu's heir, the then-owner of the newspaper, and proposed an ambitious project: the first middle-class newspaper in Romania. The opinion pieces were supposed to be clearly separated from information articles as it sought to meet the expectations of its defined target audience. In two years, following this strategy, *Cotidianul* was able to corral the best political commentators and the best investigative reporters. Although most of the other newspapers had succumbed to the impulse of tabloidization, *Cotidianul* continued steadfastly along the lines of the original project.

This situation lasted until the financial crisis. Due to the lack of a strategic investor, the media mini-empire that comprised *Cotidianul* reached the point of bankruptcy. This was the moment when the controversial businessman Sorin Ovidiu Vântu, owner of the TV news channel *Realitatea*, stepped in. Offering the perspective of a development along the same lines as before, and guaranteeing, in writing, non-interference in the editorial policies of the newspaper, the businessman bought *Cotidianul*. This state of affairs continued for a full year. As the anti-corruption campaign gained pace in the second half of the 2000s, Sorin Ovidiu Vântu began to transform the newspaper into his defense mechanism against the judicial system. The old newsroom refused the transformation and quit. The leadership of the newspaper was given to Cornel Nistorescu, a controversial journalist who, at the time, was known for his rather nostalgic views toward the communist period. In all fairness, in the early 2000s, Nistorescu did adopt a reasonable and levelheaded position when then Prime Minister Adrian Năstase sought for a near-monopoly over the mass media by the government.

Nevertheless, the changes at *Cotidianul* were sudden and brutal, as the newspaper was practically transformed overnight. The elegant and authentic debates of the previous years morphed into revenge-seeking pamphlets. The editorial line of the newspaper shifted to that of a tabloid. The spirit of dialogue was replaced with hatred. Balanced discourse and style were replaced with hate-speech. Past insightful editorials were substituted by public executions of Sorin Ovidiu Vântu's enemies. Its core audience rejected this shift and circulation dropped dramatically and swiftly, so much so that these days *Cotidianul* is a web-

only publication. In its current form, the newspaper is miles away from what its founder, Ion Rațiu, originally had in mind. This case is an excellent example that the take-over of the independent mass media in Romania by oligarchs is a process that is not necessarily dependent on the dynamics or the legacies rooted in the country's Communist past.

The examples of the post-communist transformation of newspapers such as *Adevărul* or *Cotidianul* shed light on the current stage in the development of Romanian mass media. Domestic journalism seems to have entered the phase of a subtle monopoly that more often than not brings about tacit self-censorship. One Romanian journalist diagnosed best the new state of facts: "Everybody knows the interests, enemies or political phobia of this or that oligarch. So when the journalist enters this individual's pay, s/he rents his honor and virtues at the maximum price. In the context of a rather limited demand, the price of one's own sell-out includes the likely future professional harlotries."²¹ Under the financial tutelage and leash of individuals such as Sorin Ovidiu Vântu, Dinu Patriciu, Valentin Păunescu, Viorel and Ioan Micula, or Adrian Sârbu (some of the richest and most influential individuals in the country, and owners of various media trusts), the progress of Romanian journalism has stalled. Corrupt economic, political, and media elites brought the mass media into a Purgatorial stage. It bears a resemblance to modern, inquisitive, dynamic, plural media conducive to liberal democracy, but in reality it represents the voices of a limited number of sectarian interest-groups with hardly any interest in the common good. Though harsh, Peter Gross' pronouncement does fit the bill for the contemporary situation:

With little or no understanding of or care for social responsibility, they [the oligarchs] wield their media outlets like broadswords in the interest of politics and profits, elements that are

²¹ Dan Tapalagă, "Despre presă, CTP și alși demoni," <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-arhiva-1141161-despre-presa-ctp-alti-demoni-dan-tapalaga.htm> (last accessed March 15, 2011). For an overview of the debates related to the relationship between the mass media, the oligarchs and contemporary Romanian politics see the chapter by Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Presă, servitorii și stăpânii," in his book *Bulversarea valorilor. Scrieri dintr-un timp buimac* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010).

so intertwined in Romania as to make ranking their importance impossible. In short, the Romanian media have not established themselves as an institution in its own right, a necessity in any democracy.²²

More than twenty years since the fall of communism, political totalitarianism expressed through communist newspapers seems to have transformed into multiple economic hegemonies, which are sustained by the appearance of honorability and independence of several publications (or TV and radio stations). During the first days of 1990, Silviu Brucan, former deputy editor at *Scinteia* and the ideologue of the National Salvation Front, a self-proclaimed dissident of the later years of communism (he was one of the authors of the so-called “Letter of Six”²³), claimed that true democracy would need two decades to become at least functional. Everybody, on the anti-Iliescu and anti-NSF champ, criticized him, claiming that his words were a mystification, an insult to the Romanians’ collective intelligence and will for freedom, an unhealthy attitude. Many at the time wondered, incredulously, “Why would we need twenty years when we are already free and democratic, as of noontime December 22, 1989?” As we survey the various evolutions of Romanian post-communism, it is easy now to acknowledge that he was an optimist. The present article has shown that contemporary Romanian newspapers, along with their post-1989 predecessors, firmly hold on to their second hat, which remains strikingly visible. The only change from communist times is that the former old, wrinkly, hand-cut paper hat was dropped in favor of the more widely brimmed and admittedly strapping, glamorous hat of the post-communist transition’s millionaires.

²² Peter Gross, “Forward to the Past: The Intractable Problems of Romania’s Media System,” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* vol. 13 (2008): 147.

²³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Scrisoarea celor Sase: disidentă sau fractionism”, *Evenimentul Zilei*, 18 martie 2009. Also see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003).

Part Four

AFTERMATHS OF
EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

NOEMI MARIN

*Totalitarian Discourse and Ceaușescu's
Loss of Words: Memorializing Rhetoric
in 1989 Romania*

The year 1989¹ engages Eastern and Central European countries in a discursive frenzy, where “unfrozen”² words of the past meet disparate novel civic appeals to create new words of the public sphere for the newly freed public.³ By 1989, after half a century of communist life, political changes in the region created a different arena for political discourse, a locus where public appeals of past and present connected or disconnected with effervescent voices of the underground (*samizdat*). Depicting the legacies of the past in post-communist politics, Vladimir Tismaneanu states that:

¹ This chapter along with other publications and conference papers are part of a series of projects I authored pertinent to the anniversary of 20 years from the fall of communism in Romania. Most articles and chapters as well as the conference papers are listed throughout this essay.

² Adam Michnik refers to the same comparison, stating that “communism was like a freezer.” See Adam Michnik, “Gray Is Beautiful,” in Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman, eds., *The Public Intellectual: Between Philosophy and Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 177–89, quotation on page 179.

³ Jan-Werner Muller utilizes the term “unfrozen” to explicate memory and history after the collapse of communism, for “it is to say that both personal and collective memories were liberated from constraints imposed by the need for state legitimation and friend-enemy thinking associated with the Cold War.” Jan-Werner Muller, “Introduction: The Power of Memory, The Memory of Power and the Power over Memory,” in Jan-Werner Muller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002), 1–35, quotation on page 6.

[And] the past is both communist and pre-communist, with strange blends of old and new mythologies. It is not only “progressive,” “pro-Western,” “democratic,” but also viscerally illiberal, reactionary, exclusive, intolerant. The collapse of communism has resulted in a desperate search for usable traditions: liberal and anti-liberal, civic and ethnocentric, democratic and populist, individualist and corporatist—all the old notions and ideas have been revisited and refunctionalized.⁴

The demise of communist rhetoric re-positions public discourse in the interrogative, asking questions about political practices and vocabularies of “past” or “post,” the re-invention of arguments from history and collective memory, and the fragile notion of legitimacy for heroes and villains alike. Adam Michnik recounts that “prisoners and their guards sat down at the table [...] The result is that communism has ceased to exist.”⁵ With the old “grand” narrative of communism gone, which rhetoric engages history, political order, and/or the voices of freedom?⁶ Which history gets to be told in most countries (old and new) of the former Eastern bloc? Which ethos is legitimate and for which generation of “the people”? Václav Havel, in many of his essays, pointed out that legitimacy is a post-communist ethos, writing that:

Gorbachev wants to save socialism through the market economy and free speech, while Li Peng protects socialism by massacring students, and Ceaușescu by bulldozing his people. What does *the word* [my emphasis] actually mean on the lips of one and on the

⁴ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-communist Europe* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 163.

⁵ Adam Michnik, “The Two Faces of Europe,” in *Writings on the East: Selected Essays on Eastern Europe from the New York Review of Books* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1990), 1–7.

⁶ The terms “rhetoric” and “political discourse” are used throughout the essay to refer to the political function of public discourse according to the rhetorical Aristotelian tradition.

lips of the other two? What is this mysterious thing that is being rescued in such disparate ways?⁷

Emblematic for the Eastern and Central European worlds of new democratic and discursive practices, 1989 provides a starting point for public arguments claiming historical and political legitimization; efforts that reposition people as credible voices contributing change to the public realm of these countries. "People are unfamiliar with, and therefore sometimes distrustful of, the forms and habits of democracy. But the habits of dictatorship?" asks Timothy Garton Ash in the aftermath of 1989, a question to be revisited by many scholars to come.⁸

Romania in 1989

In the context of the shattering of the entire political life of Eastern and Central Europe by democratic changes throughout 1989,⁹ Romania stands apart, only to prove the totalitarian status of

⁷ Václav Havel, "Words on Words," in *Writings on the East: Selected Essays on Eastern Europe from the New York Review of Books* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1990), 7–21, quotation on 13.

⁸ Timothy Garton Ash, "Eastern Europe: Après Le Deluge, Nous," in *Writings on the East: Selected Essays on Eastern Europe from the New York Review of Books* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1990), 21–51.

⁹ In 2009, marking the twentieth anniversary of the 1989 revolutions throughout Eastern and Central Europe, the number of scholarly conferences and publication of studies and historical documents was overwhelmingly large. Here are some of the most important conferences, during 2009, examining various dimensions of the rhetorical discursive examples presented here: "The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History," Nov. 9–10, 2009, Woodrow Wilson Center International Conference. Washington, D.C.; "Twenty Years After: Central and Eastern European Communist Regimes as a Shared Legacy," Prague, Oct. 6–9, 2009, Czech Republic; 1989 Revisited: Lessons from Two Decades of Democratic Transitions in Eastern and Central Europe, Peace Studies Program, Florida Atlantic University, Oct. 28–30, 2009, U.S.A. For a well-articulated view of the year 1989, see Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of Soviet Empire* (New York: Pantheon, 2009).

its regime.¹⁰ Nicolae Ceaușescu, who had been the Romanian Communist Party's General Secretary since 1965, led the country with unyielding isolationist politics and the cult of personality.¹¹ For the "most beloved son of the nation," the year 1989 came as a surprise, an unexpected historical anomaly that needed to be ignored.¹² Until his very end, on December 25, 1989, Ceaușescu refused to publicly acknowledge any of the events or political transformations occurring in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and of course, Poland.¹³ He simply chose to deny and/or ignore all political transformations throughout Eastern and Central Europe, and continued his political leadership as a paradigm of totalitarianism.¹⁴ Romanians in 1989 lived on food stamps and minimal conditions of survival, prohibited to travel abroad, terrorized by the (in)famous Romanian Secret Police, and kept uninformed about any democratic actions occurring outside the borders of the country. The year 1989 was one of the darkest moments in Romanian history, under Ceaușescu's regime, and yet, a year that brings also hope to the world!

Totalitarianism in its complexity has been extensively studied in the disciplines of political science and international history. Rhetorical studies contribute to the current understanding of history salient and significant accounts of public memory, examinations of public and private spheres, historical accountability of discourse, and instances of

¹⁰ See Vladimir Tismaneanu, Dobrinicu Dorin, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Raport Final- Comisia Prezidentială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste în Romania* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007).

¹¹ It is an assumed fact that Nicolae Ceaușescu is considered a totalitarian leader, similar to Hitler and Stalin. In *The Final Report of the Presidential Commission to Analyze Communist Dictatorship in Romania*, Ceaușescu is declared criminal along with the entire communist regime.

¹² Ceaușescu, in most public occasions that invited speeches from other Communist representatives, was described as "the most loved son of Romanian people."

¹³ Ceaușescu held numerous public speeches in 1989, most of them delivered on national television and in print, making no reference to any of the changes occurring in Eastern and Central Europe.

¹⁴ For Romania and the living and political conditions for its citizens in 1989, there is a plethora of studies, in particular in the historical and political sciences. Some of them are listed in the bibliographical references in the footnotes of this essay.

contemporary social justice. Within such context, the critical examination of totalitarian rhetoric intends to assess, account, and investigate how persuasive anomalies of discourse engage history in communist or fascist practices and the creation of publics. This is a time when (at least from the standpoint of European studies) historical accountability and lustration movements are inherent to academic quests to comprehend the last century in its bloodiest actions against human lives. The array of academic events and scholarship revisiting the twentieth anniversary of the communist legacy throughout the world (with limited access in the USA) supports this claim.¹⁵ More importantly, with a contemporary world at war in so many parts of the globe, Avishai Margalit's notion of forgiveness in his *Ethics of Memory* invites salient philosophical and rhetorical investigations in order to explicate public traumas and/or deeply seated nationalisms, irreversible crimes in the history of communism or fascism, and current violent actions that continue to engage such political histories into the present.¹⁶

Primarily exploring the last official instances of political discourse in Romania under Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965–1989), this study examines his isolationist perspective as a disjunction of political, historical, and rhetorical realities. It highlights dimensions pertinent to totalitarian rhetoric, and offers several discursive and cultural implications for the post-1989 public sphere. “Words can have histories, too,” said Havel in 1990:

On one occasion it [word] can open up glorious horizons; on another, it can lay down the tracks to an entire archipelago of concentration camps. The selfsame *word* [my emphasis] can at one time be the cornerstone of peace, while at another, machine-gun fire resounds in its every syllable.¹⁷

¹⁵ See the conferences listed previously, conferences that provide a sample of the global interest in the topic.

¹⁶ Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Havel, “Words on Words,” 12–13.

Totalitarian Rhetoric: 1989 Romania

Theodore Windt, in his studies on American presidential discourse, suggests that “Rhetoric is [only] at the centre of democratic politics [...] A totalitarian society has no use for rhetoric, for persuasion, for debate. Compliance with laws and authorities is enforced through coercion either by the state police or through confinement.” This perspective challenges, and perhaps misunderstands, the role and function of totalitarian rhetoric and its relevance for current scholarship.¹⁸

Cezar Ornatowski¹⁹ warns of the necessity to isolate totalitarian features of rhetoric as fundamentally different from authoritarian and/or democratic public discourse.²⁰ Sharing this perspective, the essay addresses the totalitarian dimensions of Ceaușescu’s political addresses as inherent part of Romanian communist rhetoric as well as a symptomatic political style stemming from the Soviet-communist paradigm.²¹ Such rhetorical inquiry inside the canon of totalitarianism raises challenges, because scholarship on the relationship between rhetoric and political history twenty years after the fall of communism walks a fine line between the all-inclusive effect of “communist”

¹⁸ Theodore Windt, “Presidential Rhetoric: Definition of a Discipline of Study,” in Theodore Windt and Beth Ingold, eds., *Essays in Presidential Rhetoric*, 2nd ed. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1987), xxxv.

¹⁹ Cezar M. Ornatowski, “‘The Future is Ours,’ or Is It? Rise and Fall of Totalitarian Rhetoric in Poland (and Elsewhere),” in Michelle Smith and Barbara Warnick, eds., *The Responsibilities of Rhetoric* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2010), 340–55. In addition, see Cezar Ornatowski and Noemi Marin, “*Collocutio*: Transformational Speeches,” in Robert N. Gaines, ed. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vols. 11/12 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric/Routledge, 2011), 231–37.

²⁰ Note the discussion by Ornatowski in light of Friederich and Zbigniew Brzezinski’s definition of “totalitarianism” and its distinctive features. See Carl Friederich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

²¹ In this sense, the essay also calls for a re-reading of rhetorical discourses in light of the Arendtian notion of totalitarianism. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1985). Another very useful read is A. N. Sakharov, “Our Understanding of Totalitarianism,” in Peter J. S. Duncan and Martyn Rady, eds. *Towards a New Community: Culture and Politics in Post-Totalitarian Europe* (London: LIT Verlag, 1993), 3–13.

and “post-communist rhetoric,” and the unique character and attitude toward public participation contributed by each and every discursive arena in Eastern and Central Europe. One of the most pertinent responsibilities of rhetoric, as Ernesto Grassi reminds us, is to engage with history, to explore how the shaping and reshaping of political communities through discourse uncovers “the various worlds, by ‘playing’ with our ‘orders’” at stake.²²

Ornatowski, elaborating on Nazism and Soviet Communism as qualifiers of “ideal” totalitarian societies, points out that such a definition implies:

... [an] elaborate ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man's existence to which everyone living in the society is supposed to adhere; a single mass party, typically led by one man. [...] a system of terror, whether physical or psychological, effected through party and secret police control; a technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of control of all means of effective mass communication; a similar technologically conditioned, near complete monopoly on the effective use of all weapons; and a central control and direction of the economy through the bureaucratic coordination of corporate entities.²³

Blaga Dimitrova, a well-known Bulgarian poet and political voice sensitive to language and its travails, claims that totalitarian rhetoric fundamentally provides a linguistic substitution for reality, a substitution that occurs in language, with language, and for the benefit of linguistic users of discourse in any of the countries where communism had for a political purpose the aim to reinvent the language and the culture of a nation. Indeed, communist rhetoric has left profound linguistic and rhetorical traumas; traumas that still remain difficult to heal in the new post-communist states:

²² Ernesto Grassi, “Why Rhetoric Is Philosophy,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* vol. 20 (1987): 76.

²³ Ornatowski, “The Future Is Ours,” 342.

In this way, the totalitarian regime cuts through the thousand-year-old trunk of the language. We have grown poorer without noticing what we are deprived of. The loss is irretrievable. But let us hope, in spite of all this, that that untiring inventor and creator, which is language, will engineer a system of compensation to fill the gaps left by the missing elements and forms.²⁴

It is important to note that this rhetorical phenomenon of brutal manipulation of language remains for the greater part of the twentieth century shared by most Eastern and Central European countries, as users of the Soviet-style discursive formation. The latter is a socialist episteme, to borrow Foucault's concept, of uniform international proletarian language advocated by all former communist regimes. Havel reminds us of the (in)famous "'wood[en] language,' that particular historical language of populist appeals void of meaning," that for over half a century remained "*the* [my emphasis] main political language" enforced by the Communist Parties of all countries in the Warsaw Pact.²⁵

Following the propagandistic Soviet model of discursive practice, by 1989 Ceaușescu's communist rule proposes a disjunctive and strong isolationist rhetoric intended to change Romanian language from Stalinist (totalitarian) rhetoric, to authoritarian rhetoric, and back to increasingly totalitarian rhetoric once again (Romanian-style). Romanian totalitarian rhetoric, at least by 1989, has already altered the

²⁴ Blaga Dimitrova, "Language and Politics in Bulgaria," in Peter J. S. Duncan and Martyn Rady, eds., *Towards a New Community: Culture and Politics in Post-Totalitarian Europe* (London: LIT Verlag, 1993), 138. For a more detailed rhetorical analysis of communist language in totalitarian Romania, see Noemi Marin, "History ante portas! Nicolae Ceaușescu's Speech in Response to the Timișoara Events and the Beginning of 1989 Romania Revolution," in Noemi Marin and Cezar Ornatowski, eds., *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vols. 11/12 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric/Routledge, 2011), 237–63.

²⁵ See Havel, "Words on Words," 12–13. Similarly, Nelson discusses the wooden language of communism, in particular in relation to official discourse during Ceaușescu's regime. See Daniel B. Nelson, "Romania," in Zoltán Baranyi and Iván Völgyes, eds., *The Legacies of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1995), 198–227.

traditional canon, leaving public and civic spheres of discourse to fight dramatic and traumatic battles to recreate political and civil culture, to reinvent language, and to create new or renewed spaces for democratic semantics.

For Ceaușescu, the 14th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, held in November 1989, represented “an epochal event in the millenary history of the Romanian people,” where “the edification of the socialist order” provided “the legal continuation of the historical process of forming and affirming the Romanian people”; where, again, such “edification” is nothing but the “objective requirement of the development of Romanian society in order to ensure the luminous future of all peoples!”²⁶ Representative of his political regime, the four-hour report anticipated his official acceptance address as the *Conducător* would, once again, be ‘unanimously’ elected as the political leader of the Romanian Communist Party, the Romanian General Assembly, and the Socialist Republic of Romania.²⁷

By 1989, with all his speeches broadcast on national television and radio stations, Romanian citizens are able to hear and watch Ceaușescu present interminable laundry lists of the achievements and successes of the Romanian people, emphasizing with rhetorical verve his trademark totalitarian slogans as his countrymen marched

²⁶ Author’s translation of headlines of the published part of the Report of the XIVth Romanian Communist Party Congress. See Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Raport la Congrestul al XIVlea al Partidului Communist Roman*, *Scinteia* LIX14700, Miercuri, 22 November 1989. All translations used in this study are author’s as discursive exemplifications of Romanian totalitarian speech. See Noemi Marin, Trans. “Defending Romania’s Socialist Achievements, Its Independence and Its Territorial Integrity– Address by Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu” (*Scinteia*, LIX.14726, Dec. 22, 1989, Romania) in Robert N. Gaines, ed. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vol. 7 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric/Routledge, 2005), 304–12; Noemi Marin, “Rhetoric at the Gates of Revolution: Romanian Presidential Discourse in Translation. Introduction and Notes,” in Robert N. Gaines, ed. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vol. 7 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric/Routledge, 2005), 293–96.

²⁷ During this speech, Ceaușescu was interrupted 67 times by long moments of applause and ovations from over 3,000 Communist Party representatives, willing to demonstrate their pledge to the authoritarian leader. See Tismaneanu, et al., *Final Report*, 452.

on the road to a multilaterally developed communist society.²⁸ As the November and December events continued to unfold in Eastern and Central Europe, Ceaușescu remained a tireless (tyrant) voice leading Romania to socialist victory: metaphorically, the country was under political (and rhetorical) arrest!

What characterizes Ceaușescu's political discourse of 1989 as totalitarian is his relentless and unchanging rhetoric of communist promises and praise, devoid of any acknowledgment of the realities surrounding his words. Michnik remembers his resistance to this communist rhetoric, and the injustice of being put in prison because of his struggle for a democratic Poland:

Why did we rebel against communism? [...] It was a lie, and we were searching for the truth; communism meant conformity; and we desired authenticity; it was an ongoing attack on tradition and national identity that we held to be ours; it was social inequality and injustice; and we believed in equality and justice [...] Communism meant the suppression of religion, and we held freedom of conscience to be fundamental to human right. So we rejected communism for reasons equally dear to a conservative, a socialist, and a liberal.²⁹

Looking at the year 1989 from a discursive perspective, the *déroutement* of the political, economic, and social transformation of the states long hiding behind the Iron Curtain was at odds with Ceaușescu's

²⁸ For further reference about totalitarian rhetoric, see Noemi Marin, "Ceaușescu's Rhetorical Legacy: Totalitarian Rhetoric and Its Impact on Communist Romania," in Vojtech Ripka, ed., *Twenty Years After: Central and Eastern European Communist Regimes as a Shared Legacy* (Prague: Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, 2010), 1–11.

²⁹ Michnik, "Gray Is Beautiful," 181. Of note that during the conference "The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History," Nov. 9–10, 2009, Woodrow Wilson Center International Conference. Washington, D.C., Jeffrey Isaac and the author of this essay both made reference specifically to Michnik's notion of 'gray democracy' as an important starting point for transitional politics and transition rhetoric, in particular applicable to engage discourse and history for a better future of the countries in the area.

official discourse, always returning to totalitarian language.³⁰ A mere read of the list of Ceaușescu's last three months of public speeches and activities during the autumn of 1989 demonstrates his isolationist perspective in complete disjunction with the rest of the Eastern and Central European block.

On December 20, 1989, returning from a two-day trip to Iran, Ceaușescu speaks on national television and radio stations about the events in Timișoara, in order to appease the Romanian population. He calls for national security and order and threatened with military retaliation in case of disobedience.³¹ On December 21, 1989, Ceaușescu's presidential address in Bucharest is interrupted in mid-sentence, only to be replaced by voices of the street and words of change calling for political change, a starting and startling emergence of the rhetoric of the Romanian Revolution. Along with the November Report mentioned above, this essay utilizes Ceaușescu's speeches as characteristic examples of totalitarian rhetoric in communist Romania.³²

The idea of rhetoric as propagandistic persuasion, and in particular Jacques Ellul's notion of "total propaganda," carries the premise of the overall argument of this essay.³³ Along with its propagandistic

³⁰ While in the official discourses the Romanian leader was oblivious to either acknowledge his fellow citizens their right to political action or to present revolutionary changes surrounding Romania, documents attest he had remained informed of the Timișoara civil unrest and societal transformations. The documents printed in *Adevărul (The Truth)* in October 2009 disclose the discussions in his office reveal clear evidence of his awareness of the situation all throughout Eastern and Central Europe. See *Adevărul* http://www.adevarul.ro/societate/dupa_20_de_ani/Ceaușescu-Demisia-Nicolae-minute-lui_0_0140385999.html.

³¹ For the specific examination of Ceaușescu's speech delivered on December 20, 1989. See Marin, "Ceaușescu's Rhetorical Legacy Totalitarian Discourse and its Impact on Communist Romania" (2010).

³² This essay utilizes mainly the three speeches mentioned as examples of Ceaușescu's totalitarian rhetoric.

³³ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1965). While scholarly debates conceptualizing differences between total propaganda and totalitarian rhetoric can add theoretical relevance to the theme of this scholarly collection, the scope of the study primarily reveals the relationship between rhetoric and collective persuasion, which influences history and politics through one of the most powerful human means of symbolic action-language.

dimensions, the study of the discursive interactions between political discourse and the practices of communist regimes provide critical insights that focus less on propagandistic praxis and more on investigating how language *can be* changed in totalitarian states. In the case of communist Romania in 1989, the examination of Ceaușescu's rigid rhetoric reveals "the dissonance between political regime and its public, precipitating the moment of crisis and accelerating the pace of revolutionary change."³⁴

EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC AND TOTALITARIAN DIMENSIONS

Celeste Condit has argued that epideictic speeches assist communities to both understand their own values and enable them to judge the speakers' potential for leadership through a shared evaluation of eloquence and "human vision."³⁵ For Condit, epideictic rhetoric—as an appraisal of public arguments—defines an important genre that builds and creates a community for both speaker and audience, particularly in times of crisis. As Ornatowski elaborates in his study of Polish communist discourse, authoritative and democratic rhetoric, as part of contemporary forms of political and cultural discourse, also comprise the epideictic genre.

What makes epideictic rhetoric pertain to all Eastern and Central European communist political discourse (at least in its official forms), is its fundamental engagement of communist vocabularies with communal dimensions, thus leaving little room for political deliberation and/or public arguments. For historians of communist rhetoric, however, the epideictic genre requires to be studied both in tone and intensity, in order to understand the nuances of political discourse, differentiated yet somewhat shared by all former communist countries in the area. A political witness to the damaging words of communist public discourse, Dimitrova warns that:

³⁴ Cezar Ornatowski and Noemi Marin, "Collocutio: Transformational Speeches," in Noemi Marin and Cezar Ornatowski, eds. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vols. 11/12 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric/Routledge, 2011), 235.

³⁵ Celeste Condit, "The Function of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," *Communication Quarterly* vol. 33 (1985): 284–98.

The mechanism of the totalitarian system works in such a way that everything converts into its opposite. Proclaimed freedom is slavery; independence comes to mean total dependence; equality means the inequality of Party class structures; the “classless society” becomes a feudal differentiation of classes and sub-classes. But the most amazing transformation is when honest people turn, unawares, into accomplices of totalitarian crimes through their industriousness, their discipline and loyalty; when personalities convert into nameless creatures and into faceless spectres. Language is one of the magic means of these metamorphoses.³⁶

Romanian rhetoric, Ceaușescu-style, stems from a double dipping inside the “wooden language” vocabulary, placing it, by the end of 1989, at odds with neighbouring political voices, with all freeing words of democratic change in Eastern and Central European countries. Rather than diminuendo, Ceaușescu chooses crescendo as the strategic rendition of epideictic discourse, placing his political wordings within an increasingly dictatorial realm of intense praise and blame formulations, while leading Romanians on the road to political “bliss” (ironic use of the word) and a communist future.³⁷ The endless, intense, and abusive practices of praise-filled political language for a community of *one* (my emphasis) that had been dominating national discourse from 1965 onwards, by 1989 no longer carry any rhetorical powers to mobilize Romanians and share a political language.³⁸ Rather, totalitarian tones are de-mobilizing and de-stabilizing the Romanian public sphere, leaving no room for deliberative, democratic or public arguments: an empty rhetorical stage for an empty rhetorical public sphere. Totalitarian rhetoric based on epideictic functions of discourse translate in the late 1980s into aggressive verbiage, superlatives, and emphatic forms aggressively affecting Romanian language in its grammar and cultural memory. As this essay will discuss later, such

³⁶ Blaga Dimitrova. “Language and Politics in Bulgaria,” 144.

³⁷ While “bliss” might seem emphatic here, Ceaușescu in most of his speeches utilizes strong and intense words, hence this usage seems appropriate to create an ironic effect, according to the author.

³⁸ “One” here refers to the well-known cult of personality developed by Ceaușescu in the 1980s.

a strategic depletion of linguistic and rhetorical resources for political discourse might explain some of the post-communist discursive phenomena of current Romania.

Accordingly, for the everlastingly-designed communist discourse, epideictic rhetoric functions as the umbrella genre intended to solidify and strengthen public and political appeals, never to be questioned, always to be accepted as declamatory action of communist activism. From 1965 onwards, the emphatic usage of “praise and blame” style of political presentations dominate the Romanian leader’s political speeches, culminating in 1989 in a re-vamped vocabulary of foes and heroes and a new grammar of victory; in other words, a strategic correction of language as human communication, Ceaușescu-style. “New era,” “new state,” “new socialist economy,” “new multi-developed and multilateral new man,” “new Romanian future,” and many more such words provide endless descriptions of the one and only communist-style promised future as depicted in Ceaușescu’s own grammar of victory. In the multitude of speeches uttered by “the most beloved son of the nation” (my paraphrase), only descriptive and declamatory language carry political and rhetorical legitimation, leaving vituperative strategies the mission to create rhetorical and public contrast from democratic or civil society narratives starting to emerge in the area, irreconcilable foes in his interpretation of political reality.³⁹ This is how Ceaușescu’s address on December 22, 1989, would have ended according to the print version of the speech:

Let us act with full responsibility to demonstrate our strength and the ability of all working people from the Capital, to demonstrate our strength and our entire nation’s ability to develop our country, create high standards of living for our people, and protect our independence in our country! [...] Let you organize in all companies, factories and institutes, everywhere, groups responsible for maintaining the social order, groups responsible for defending socialism, defending all our achievements and independence. All together, we need to act on behalf of

³⁹ The majority of examples in this last sentence are from the 14th Romanian Communist Party Report delivered by Ceaușescu on November 14, 1989.

our people, on behalf of our independence, on behalf of our socialism!⁴⁰

For Ceaușescu in 1989, epideictic rhetoric prevails, a “multi-developed” totalitarian praxis of several decades of communist public speaking, letting deliberative and/or forensic rhetoric subsequently inoperative. Part of epideictic formulations in Ceaușescu’s speeches, superlatives and comparatives constitute the consequential strategic move from the grammar of totalitarian rhetoric to the rhetoric of totalitarianism—a most fitting glorification of the total success of the Romanian Communist Party. After all, “[Language] is the main means of cultural production in socialism,” a well-known slogan utilized to encourage all language experts contributing to the spread of communist ideology as a “scientific concept” put it.⁴¹

It is difficult to write about totalitarian rhetorical praxis without creating explicatory notes for the concurrent meanings of such wordings in the private lives of the Romanian population.⁴² More than ever, in 1989 the Romanian political arena becomes a cultural site of tension between totalitarian public discourse and the meaning/use of underground dissent for daily life.⁴³

⁴⁰ The actual discourse was interrupted, but the print version of the speech appeared in print later that day. Nicolae Ceaușescu quoted in Noemi Marin “Rhetoric at the Gates of Revolution: Romanian Presidential Discourse in Translation,” in Robert N. Gaines, ed. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vol. 7 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric, 2005), 301–2.

⁴¹ Lavinia Betea, “Comunicare și Discurs în ‘Limba de Lemn’ a Regimului Comunist,” *Argumentum* 3 (2004–2005): 36–65 (translation by the author).

⁴² “LXXX: Anii 80 și Bucureștenii” is a best-selling collective volume that functions as a rhetorical repository of official and unofficial political language, a lexicon of terms *said* (or officially uttered) and their *actual meanings* in a society under dictatorship, in a public sphere where conflicting realities translate into divergent practices of home and official political discourse.

⁴³ Probably more than in any other country, Romania’s dissident discourse can be studied in relation to the rich underground vocabularies and humor developed during Ceaușescu’s regime in 1980s. While studying East Germany during the late 1980s, Kerry Kathleen Riley argues for the relevance of unofficial discourse in Eastern and Central Europe. See Kerry Kathleen Riley, *Everyday Subversion: From Joking to Revolting in the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2008).

Well-known and well-documented by now in multiple studies, by 1989 Romanian-style totalitarian language stands as proof of *a closed and petrified* (my emphasis) discursive formula, in sharp contrast with the transformative democratic vocabulary pertinent to civil society in the contemporary world. Extensively researched by Slama-Cazacu, Lavinia Betea, and Ilie Rad (to mention just a few Romanian scholars), “wooden language” in Ceaușescu’s communist discourse singles out epideictic appeals as the main rhetorical options of active audience participation.⁴⁴ A discursive concept inherent in the overall epideictic praxis of communist speech, “wooden language” is constantly offered as innumerable speeches and indoctrinatory versions attest to the communist formulae of public appeals in the last years of the 1980s.

And yet, Ceaușescu proclaims to enhance his own “wooden language” by relentless declamations of communist laudations and endless hours of slogans glorifying the Romanian Communist Party and its forever ruling plans to lead the country. All in the name of the Romanian people, all in the name of legitimate representations of one single communist voice of all publics in Romania. The mentioned speeches (November 14 and 15, December 20 and 21, 1989) re-affirm this very point.⁴⁵ In the print version of his televised address (on 20 December 1989), the Romanian President utilizes his arsenal of totalitarian slogans and empty emphatic patriotic appeals:

It is necessary, dear comrades and friends, citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania, to demonstrate the high responsibility and wisdom our people are capable of, and who, under the most difficult circumstances, offered major sacrifices throughout history.

⁴⁴ One of the most recent collections of research on “wooden language” contains important contributions by scholars and journalists focusing on Romanian national practices. Ilie Rad, ed., *Limba de Lemn în Presă* (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2009).

⁴⁵ Such speeches point to a most telling argument, offered by Lavinia Betea in a fascinating study that compares Ceaușescu’s Report at the Romanian Communist Party in 1974 and his last Report presented in November of 1989. See Lavinia Betea, “Comunicare și Discurs în ‘Limba de Lemn’ a Regimului Comunist,” *Argumentum* 3 (2004–2005) 36–65. Another important publication on the topic of “wooden language” is offered by Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, *Stratagemă Comunicatională și Manipularea* (Iasi: Polirom, 2000).

[...] Dear comrades and friends, dear compatriots, I call you to strengthen your collaboration and unity, to do everything in our power to preserve our freedom, to build socialism and to continue and create well-being for our people, and to preserve Romania's integrity and independence!⁴⁶

What turns epideictic rhetoric into totalitarian praxis is Ceaușescu's political style of address, which functions only for the purpose of meeting the demands of a univocal and unilateral leader devoid of an audience, entrenched in his own performance of despotic political discourse.

WE-THEY: THE JOURNEY INTO TOTALITARIAN PRONOUNS

As Romanian audiences could not speak in any other way than through unequivocal adherence to the totalitarian "praise and blame" discourse, the first person singular pronoun "I" is no longer part of the political language of the 1989 public sphere. Rather, rhetorical prowess is given to the over-imposed collective pronoun "we" as the *only* (my emphasis) enthymematic collective, a unison pronoun that justifies and legitimates the oneness with and the oneness of the voice of the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, the only voice intended to be heard in the political arena of a country.

I want to openly declare that I would not be able to honor the Romanian people's vote of confidence if I were not to do everything in my power to defend Romania's integrity, independence

⁴⁶ Noemi Marin, Transl. "Ceaușescu's Speech on Timisoara and the Romanian Revolution." ("Cuvîntarea rostită de președintele Nicolae Ceaușescu în seara zilei de 20 decembrie 1989 la posturile de radio și televiziune) in Noemi Marin and Cezar Ornatowski, eds. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vols. 11/12 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric /Routledge, 2011), 250–63. See the original text, Nicolae Ceaușescu, "Cuvîntarea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la posturile de radio și televiziune," *Scînteia* LIX 14725, 21 Decembrie 1989. Reprinted by *Adevarul.ro* online, 27 Oct. 2009. http://www.adevarul.ro/societate_dupa_20_de_ani/TVR-Cuvantare-Ceau_șescu-Nicolae-decembrie_0_014285874.html.

and sovereignty, as well as defending the right of our people to decide its development independently, without any foreign interference or intervention.⁴⁷

In totalitarian rhetoric, the use of the imperative (verbal mood) and the populist pronoun “we” join forces to present the only formula for public speeches that call for legitimate participation in political life. Of note that the imperative mood constitutes a trademark in “wooden” rhetoric, no matter in which language inside the Warsaw Pact! Intended to turn speech into military commands, the use of the imperative becomes a rhetorical strategy “hammered into our heads during these decades to an extent that we have stopped hearing it all together. [Thus] achieving its opposite effect, instead of inciting the communist masses, it lulled all of us into inaction.”⁴⁸ As Dimitrova unveils in her linguistic account of communist language, political appeals that translate into orders for “us” and “we” carry along never-ending sequences of nouns, obsessively reiterating how “our people” have to ensure the unchallenged victories of a multilaterally developed country like Romania.⁴⁹

Reminiscing on the plural pronoun “we” as a powerful reminder of communist ideology and propaganda imposed on the population, Drakulić declares that:

I hate the first-person plural. But it is only now, seeing it in my own writing, that I realize how much I hate it. My resistance to it is almost physical, because more than anything else, to me it represents a physical experience. I can smell the scent of bodies pressed against me in a 1 May parade, [...] I can feel the crowd pushing me forward, all of us moving as one, a single body—a sort of automatic puppet-like motion because no one is capable of anything else.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Dimitrova, “Language and Politics,” 136.

⁴⁹ Betea, “Comunicare și discurs,” 53–5. Of note, Lavinia Betea in this particular examination, offers a remarkable analysis of Romanian transformation of political language utilizing a psycho-sociological perspective. The findings reveal no difference other than extra verbiage added to the same rhetorical strategy of epideictic political discourse.

⁵⁰ Drakulić, *Café Europa. Life after Communism* (London: Abacus, 1996), 1–2.

As part of the relentless “praise and blame” strategic appeals to justify his totalitarian regime, the Romanian leader legitimizes “we” as the necessary condition to politically construct both villains and friends under “they.” While “wooden language” praising “we” might include national, political, and cultural friends, in Ceaușescu’s rhetorical world, vituperation proclaims “they” as the identity of foes:

The campaign started by different circles and governments against Romania fully demonstrates that such actions (civil unrest) had been prepared and planned a long time in advance. Obviously, one has to posit this question: why those imperialist circles and governments, making all sorts of anti-Romania declarations and statements, why had they never issued any statements about the very critical events occurring lately in other countries?⁵¹

Even on the very last day of his regime, on December 22, 1989, Ceaușescu continues to revisit such pronoun dyads only remind the Romanian people of the full totalitarian use of friends-and-foes powers of persuasion, as he states that:

As for the Timișoara events, we addressed them last night. It is obvious this is a conjectured action by (subversive) circles who intend to destroy Romanian integrity and sovereignty, stop the construction of socialism, and place our people under foreign rule. Therefore, we need to protect by all means, and with all our power, Romania’s integrity and independence!⁵²

⁵¹ See Noemi Marin, Transl. “Ceaușescu’s Speech on Timișoara and the Romanian Revolution.” (Cuvântarea rostită de președintele Nicolae Ceaușescu în seara zilei de 20 decembrie 1989 la posturile de radio și televiziune) in Noemi Marin and Cezar Ornatowski, eds. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, vols. 11/12. (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric/Routledge, 2011), 250–63. See the original text, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Cuvântarea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la posturile de radio și televiziune,” *Scinteia* LIX 14725, 21 Decembrie 1989. Reprinted by *Adevarul.ro* online, 27 Oct. 2009. http://www.adevarul.ro/societate_dupa_20_de_ani/TVR-Cuvantare-Ceau_șescu-Nicolae-decembrie_0_014285874.html.

⁵² Ibid.

Personified either in the Romanian people or in the (imperialist) villains of an international conspiracy, “we” and “they” create *only* (my emphasis) normative and perfunctory duos for the epideictic discourse.⁵³ The “we” of totalitarian political discourse functions fundamentally as a homogenous rhetorical group, never living without “them,” always referring to a plural of “otherness,” thus standing enthymematically and filling all political identities of villains and foes: enemies of the country, of the state, of the region, of motherland, etc.—a long list in the Romanian paradigm of 1989.⁵⁴ Such a perfunctory difference imposed and re-enacted for over 45 years might explain some of the difficult challenges of the rhetoric of transformation in post-communist Romania.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIAN POST-1989 POLITICAL DISCOURSE

One can have a clear perspective of how reverse persuasion works precisely by looking into the historical context of 1989 and its transformative discursive powers. With rigid and petrified appeals as the only existing political grammar, Romanians try to create a rhetorical space in order to legitimize the impetus for new democratic vocabularies of freedom. This vehement isolationist discourse can also generate a dynamic of hope, since totalitarian tirades reveal the “other side” of political discourse, i.e. one potentially able to foster the viable needs of people to change language and life altogether.

At a time when most Eastern and Central European countries entered the realm of political transition, Ceaușescu’s rhetorical appeals clashed with the growing hopes of Romanians to hear the bells of freedom. Thus, aside from historical, political, socio-cultural and economic changes, Romanian political discourse of 1989 marked the end of a rhetorical era, of forty-five years of totalitarian rhetoric and a polit-

⁵³ In the December 20, 1989 speech, Ceaușescu uses the term “imperialist.”

⁵⁴ See Noemi Marin, *After the Fall: Rhetoric in the Aftermath of Dissent in Post-Communist Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). See also Noemi Marin, “The Other Side(s) of History: The Return of Rhetoric,” in Robert N. Gaines, ed., *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vol. 9 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric, 2006), 209–27.

ical discourse that had left no space for democratic or civic deliberation in the public sphere.

And yet, the relationship between the rhetoric and the history of 1989 calls for many more critical explorations of the complicated pursuit of democratic discourse in present times, an appeal repeatedly made by most public intellectuals from Eastern and Central Europe. Havel, recognized as one of *the* public voices of democracy and dissent, writes that after communism, “[W]e still do not know how to put morality ahead of politics, science, and economics [...] History has accelerated. I believe that once again it will be the human mind that will notice this acceleration, give it a name and transform those words into deeds.”⁵⁵

The condemnation of the communist regime as “illegitimate and criminal” in a speech by the current President of Romania, in December 2006, a dramatic and for many, traumatic public action,⁵⁶ framed an important rhetorical attitude toward communist history, as it logistically and legally proclaimed the termination of a historical era. In doing so, all participants in this historical process have to address purging questions of legitimacy along with attitudes toward a Romanian history of the future. Following in the footsteps of Czech and East German lustration laws, the monumental Final Report of the Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania puts forth a powerful political response of Romania as a nation dedicated to rebuilding public trust, and with it, a new history.⁵⁷

From a rhetorical perspective, explorations of totalitarian discourse during Ceaușescu's regime bring with them a tumult of political narratives, public and/or historical arguments that continue to form, re-form, and/or unsettle the new future; a yet-to-settle time for yet-to-settle citizens of post-communist Romania. What, then, are some of these discursive implications for Romanian political life twenty years after its liberation from totalitarian discourse?

⁵⁵ Václav Havel, “Living in Extraordinary Times,” *Public Welfare*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1990): 9.

⁵⁶ Of note that the *Report* continues to be brought into public debate in political analyses and Romanian media.

⁵⁷ See the discussion on Pastor Joachim Gauck and his perspective on public trust in Tismaneanu, *Fantasies*, 126–27.

Since Ceaușescu's totalitarian style of rhetoric did not allow for any official praxis of deliberative and forensic discourse to enter the Romanian public sphere prior to 1989, such overwhelming absence of discursive difference and civic language might explain some linguistic and rhetorical phenomena occurring nowadays. The author of this essay has argued in previous works that Romanian political discourse continues to fight instability and legitimacy, as rigid political discourse intersects with yet-to-strengthen vocabularies of democracy.⁵⁸ Rhetoric still has to engage in the unfinished business with history.

Vague arguments, political ambiguity, and perfunctory performances within a single and simplified rhetorical style of political discourse need to step aside in favour of more complex discursive formations that call for deliberative language to engage with margins (to utilize a Foucaultian notion pertinent to discursive epistemes) of the public sphere as well. Romanian political rhetoric carries with it nostalgic languages of the past along with old "praise and blame" practices, thus offering less space for "otherness," or for new or renewed argumentative practices pertinent to civic political traditions.

For Romania, history continues to reveal unsettled vocabularies that carry multiple clusters of political discontent, all contextualized in transition rhetoric. Even after two decades of political change, the ethos of public legitimation brings into the traumatized public sphere collapsed "foe-and-friends roles of history in order to balance politics and civic participation in the new political arenas" of this renewed country.⁵⁹

An obsessive use of the emphatic style of flattery or vituperative expressions, and a rhetorical reduction of the political dialogue to the relationship between "our people, state and/or nation" and the forever inimical "they," stand as political players in the devastating nationalistic discourse currently employed in many of the political and public spheres of post-communism. In Romania, extreme nationalist views bring to the surface epideictic use of national identity arguments remi-

⁵⁸ Marin, *After the Fall* (2007); and Marin, "The Other Side(s) of History" (2006).

⁵⁹ Noemi Marin, "The Other Side(s) of History: The Return of Rhetoric," in Robert N. Gaines, ed., *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* vol. 9 (College Park, MD: American Society for the History of Rhetoric, 2006), 214.

niscent of well-versed communist speeches long permeating the pre-1989 political arena. Much of this vehemently nationalist(ic) rhetoric brings no public argumentation or deliberative powers into public discourse, rather encourages a re-emphasis of “wooden” qualities of communist totalitarian language to be re-presented.

The rhetorical legacy emblematic for all countries formerly hiding behind the Iron Curtain carries potentially coherent yet unsettled rhetorical practices, as narratives of times past and present interact with histories of legitimation and political redefinitions of publicness and public voice. Havel depicts post-1989 as follows:

The fall of communism destroyed this shroud of sameness, and the world was caught napping by an outburst of the many unanticipated differences concealed beneath it, each of which—after such a long time in the shadows—felt a natural need to draw attention to itself, to emphasize its uniqueness, and its difference from others. This is the reason for the eruption of so many different kinds of old-fashioned patriotism, revivalist Messianism, conservatism, and expressions of hatred toward all those who appeared to be betraying their roots or identifying with different ones.⁶⁰

Revisiting post-communism as a democratic action, Adam Michnik described Eastern and Central Europe through the metaphor of “gray,” a color appropriated by history and rhetoric alike for transition societies, where discourse takes on chaos and drama as co-participants. Advocating in defense of “gray democracy” as the only kind able to assist public discourse for the “history-after” post-1989, Michnik stated that “Dictatorships, whether red or black, destroy the human capacity for creation; they kill the taste for human life and eventually life itself. Only gray democracy, with its human rights and institutions of civil society can replace weapons with arguments.”⁶¹

Twenty years later, Romania’s legacy of the communist discourse provides a symptomatic insight into communist rhetorical practices

⁶⁰ Václav Havel, “The Post-Communist Nightmare,” *The New York Review of Books* (27 May 1993): 8–10.

⁶¹ Michnik, “Gray Is Beautiful,” 184.

shared by most societies once part of the (in)famous Iron Curtain. Thus, critical scholarship on totalitarian rhetoric, on the relationship between political rhetoric and regimes need to be at the forefront of contemporary studies, as public and global focus of academic research merge in scope and explorations of social justice and civic understandings of the world.

MARCI SHORE

*“A Spectre is Haunting Europe...”:
Dissidents, Intellectuals and a New
Generation*

“A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism,” wrote Marx and Engels in 1848. Yet communism, once no longer a spectre *to come* became a spectre from the past. The revolutions of 1989 were a wrinkle in time: time, seemingly halted for so long, suddenly leapt forward. The revolutions, too, were an opening of a Pandora’s Box - and a vindication of Freud’s warning that the repressed would return. A certain parallel to Freud’s unconscious—that dark psychic closet into which everything too disturbing is thrown—has appeared in the communist archives. Freud, for his part, had no illusions that coaxing the contents of that psychic closet into consciousness would prove painless. And psychoanalysis, in contrast to Marxism, never promised any happily ever after.¹

Ketman and Camels

In February 1990, Václav Havel, as the new president of Czechoslovakia, gave his first address before the United States Congress. “Consciousness precedes Being,” Havel told the senators and con-

¹ I would like to thank Anna Muller and Timothy Snyder for comments on earlier versions of this essay. I would also like to thank Izabela Kalinowska for suggesting *Trzech kumpli*; Dariusz Stola for an excellent paper about the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej at the September 2009 conference “Tomorrow’s Yesterday: Memory Politics in Europe” at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen; Samuel Abrahám, Benjamin Frommer, Adam Hradilek, and Martin Šimečka for conversations on the “Kundera affair”; and the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna for being, as always, a wonderfully collegial place to think and write.

gressmen, “and not the other way around, as the Marxists claim.”² Very few of his listeners had any idea what he meant. It was doubtful that more than a handful even followed the reference to Marx’s idea of consciousness as derivative of a given person’s position in the socio-economic order.

After the political revolution, Havel hoped for a revolution of consciousness. He opposed revenge; accounting with the past, he believed, was above all a matter of accounting with one’s own conscience. Yet in 1992, over Havel’s opposition, Havel’s fellow dissident and Charter 77 signatory Petr Cibulka published a list of some 160,000 names of people supposedly implicated by cooperation with the communist-era Czechoslovak secret police. “Cibulka’s List” was vigilante justice. It was also an expression of a longing for moral clarity, something equivalent to the distinctness of truth versus lies, a central theme of dissident philosophy.³

In the communist years, dissidents for obvious reasons were especially targeted for collaboration. The secret police always had various methods of coercion at their disposal; some people simply proved more resilient than others. The poet and philosopher Egon Bondy had been one of the gurus of the Czechoslovak underground. The Velvet Underground-inspired rock band The Plastic People of the Universe—the arrest of whose members had been the impetus for Charter 77—had used Bondy’s poems as song lyrics. Then his name appeared on Cibulka’s list as an informer.

Paul Wilson, the Canadian who was once The Plastic People’s lead singer, was Egon Bondy’s friend. Nonetheless, Wilson believed it was true: there were actual transcripts. And the secret police had put so much pressure on Bondy, Wilson remembered, at a time when his friend had been near collapse. He could believe that Bondy had been broken. This did not make him evil, though, Wilson insisted. In fact, Cibulka’s List had revealed that several people Paul Wilson had known well in the underground of the 1970s were informers. Not infrequently

² Václav Havel, “Help the Soviet Union on the Road to Democracy: Consciousness Precedes Being,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* vol. 56, no. 11 (15 March 1990): 327–30.

³ Petr Cibulka, *Cibulkovy seznamy spolupracovníků StB* (Olomouc: Votobia, 1999). Originally published in *Necenzurované noviny* no. 13 (1992).

the friends who were their victims forgave them. "Of all the people I knew," Wilson said, "it was the people who were the most harmed by informers who were also the most forgiving of those informers."⁴

Thirteen years after Cibulka's List came Wildstein's List. What happened in Czechoslovakia in 1992 happened in Poland in 2005, a year after Poland had joined the European Union. At that time, Bronisław Wildstein, a conservative journalist, illegally acquired a list of names from Poland's Institute of National Remembrance, the state institution responsible for the former secret police archives. Wildstein's was a list of names that included people who had cooperated with the secret police—as well as people whom the secret police were watching, hoping to induce to cooperate. Wildstein posted his list on the internet.

It was a pernicious thing that Bronisław Wildstein did: many of the names on the list were names of former dissidents, whom the secret police had sought to coerce into informing on their friends. The only way to prove one's innocence, though, was to expose potentially the full contents of the file. This could mean to publicize all the secret police knew about oneself. And they perhaps knew a lot: after all, eavesdropping was their profession. They could know what a given person under observation said to his wife in bed—sometimes for years. It was as if the secret police were taking their revenge for the end of the system that had empowered them—without, in fact, their doing anything at all.⁵

Following the publication of Wildstein's List, directors Ewa Stankiewicz and Anna Ferens made the film *Trzech kumpli* ("Three Buddies"), a documentary about the maverick journalist Bronisław Wildstein. In Kraków during the 1970s, Wildstein, together with his fellow university students Stanisław Pyjas and Lesław Maleszka, had formed a trio of young friends, part of a wider circle of students critical of the communist regime and interested in censored literature. At least once, in 1976, the three were detained and interrogated, although they never spent any length of time in prison.

⁴ Paul Wilson, lecture, Gordon Skilling's Flying Czech Seminar, (Toronto 1996).

⁵ "The Polish example is, in its way, instructive," Martin Šimečka wrote, "and shows that a country that tries to draw a 'thick line' behind the past only delays one's trauma." Martin M. Šimečka, "Archivy jako zbraň: Analýza," *Respekt* (26 June 2009).

One day, Wildstein, Maleszka and several others among their friends received anonymous letters accusing Stanisław Pyjas of being a secret police informer. The letters contained personal information, intimate details that only someone very close to them would know. A quarter-century later, Bronisław Wildstein was still overcome with revulsion at the ugliness of it all: letters written by someone who could see into their bedrooms. Not long afterwards the secret police murdered Stanisław Pyjas. During the quarter-century that followed, Bronisław Wildstein remained obsessed with finding out who was responsible for his friend's death. In time the archives began to provide a fuller picture: Lesław Maleszka had been "turned" after that 1976 arrest. He had been young, and scared, the secret police had intimidated him. That was all. He had become an informer, and was quite possibly in part responsible—however unwillingly—for his friend's death. This was the context for Wildstein's List—a demonic gesture motivated by a real betrayal. "I would like my life to have some weight," Bronisław Wildstein said in the film.

The filmmakers interviewed Lesław Maleszka's secret police "handler," an unexceptional, now middle-aged man who had obviously been quite fond of Lesław Maleszka—or at least had been quite fond of the idea that he had recruited an authentic intellectual. Their encounters, the handler insisted, were not primarily intimidation sessions. On the contrary: they were social occasions, the handler looked forward to them. To this day it remained a point of pride that he, a working class man, had become so friendly with a Jagiellonian University student. He was flattered by their rapport, by the congeniality of their meetings, by Lesław Maleszka's company.

Lesław Maleszka's double life lasted for a long time. After university, he remained in dissident circles—and in the service of the secret police. No one knew. Again and again the filmmakers who interviewed Lesław Maleszka asked him, "Why?" And each time he responded, "*Doskonałe pytanie.*" *An excellent question.* Yet to this excellent question Lesław Maleszka had no answer.

When in 1976 Lesław Maleszka had been "turned," he had chosen "Ketman" for his pseudonym. In November 2001, twenty-five years after he had made his decision to collaborate, Lesław Maleszka wrote a long essay for *Gazeta Wyborcza* titled "*Byłem Ketmanem...*" *I was Ketman...*

"I seek no justifications," Maleszka began. He only wanted to explain: it was 1976, the interrogation was brutal: the dark room, the light shining directly in his eyes, the three interrogators in rotation, the curses and threats, the promises of beatings to come. For several hours Maleszka dissimulated, he attempted to fabricate a story, but the interrogators already seemed to know so much. He knew, too, that in other rooms, his friends were being questioned at the same time. He was convinced that the secret police must already know everything about them. He panicked; he began to plead with his interrogators not to expel him from the university.

"You want to study?" the interrogators asked him. "*Coś za coś.*" *You don't get something for nothing.* There was no justification for what he had done, Maleszka acknowledged, neither his excellent grades, nor his good chances of being awarded a teaching assistantship after graduation, nor his fascination with literary theory. The officers gave Maleszka a pen, a sheet of paper, and dictated his declaration of cooperation. Then they ordered him to choose a pseudonym. That was when he remembered Ketman. It was not a common reference, but it was one a student of literature would know: Ketman came from *The Captive Mind*, Czesław Miłosz's classic account of the collusion of the intellectuals with the communist regime. The heart of the book, written just after Miłosz's own defection from Stalinist Poland in 1951, consisted of four character sketches, all of writers: Alpha the Moralizer (Jerzy Andrzejewski), Beta the Disappointed Love (Tadeusz Borowski), Gamma the Slave of History (Jerzy Putrament), and Delta the Troubadour (Konstanty Gałczyński). Seeking to understand his colleagues' choices, Miłosz borrowed from an Islamic tradition the idea of "Ketman," a kind of splitting of the self into public and private selves, an intersection of opportunism and belief.⁶ Maleszka wrote:

A person of two religions, who conceals his true views, feigning loyalty to the oppressive power. It seemed to me that such a game would be possible. At the time it didn't enter my mind that Ketman had to plunge into an internal lie, which in the end

⁶ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 80.

would penetrate his entire essence. That this was a road leading into a blind alley.

The secret police were interested in everything. That they regarded Maleszka as their own did not deter them from rummaging through his private life. They always wanted to know who drank vodka with whom, and where. They wanted to know if the priest who sympathized with the students had a lover—or lovers. Sometimes they paid him.

Nineteen seventy-six was an important year in the history of the Polish opposition. It was the year that saw the beginning of KOR, the *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (the Committee for the Workers' Defense), the moment when the intellectuals reached out to join the workers. It was a moment that in Czechoslovakia never came: to the very end, Charter 77 remained a ghetto of intellectuals. In Poland, though, KOR was the beginning of a real solidarity.

Maleszka and his friends were involved with KOR from the first years. While Lesław Maleszka distributed underground literature, collected money and signatures, "Ketman" reported these activities to the secret police. "I lived thus for years," Lesław Maleszka remembered, "in a psychic and moral schizophrenia."

On 7 May 1977 his friend Stanisław Pyjas was murdered. It was then that Lesław Maleszka—alias Ketman—realized: who was he to believe he could trust his handlers? To them he was just a kid to be exploited, "a small, blackmailed and brow-beaten pawn, who plays a meager role in a theater not his own." This is how his illusions about Ketman came to an end.

How could he have betrayed his closest friends? How could he have continued to work with the secret police after they had killed Stanisław Pyjas? Even today, all those years later, he was unable to answer these questions, unable to understand his own motivations. He had been very afraid, he had lived with a fear he was unable to overcome. Still, he knew that this failed to explain it all.

"I have only one wish," Lesław Maleszka wrote in conclusion.

I would like my personal file amassed by State Security to be the first—and the last—to be made public. By means of blackmail, fear, provocation, beatings, the political police in a communist state broke the moral backbones of many people. They did not

always manage to break everyone as easily as they broke me, but the results must have been equally lamentable. For the past dozen years each of those people has tried to forget about the drama he lived through. About the fact that he did evil to those closest to them—at the same time living with the feeling that he himself had fallen victim to violence. Today each of those people awaits his judgment day—when the opening of the file will break apart the circle of people he knows, sometimes his family, when it will render him a villain. I understand that the state's administrative apparatus should be informed about the past of its higher-ranking civil servants, people entrusted with information of a particular weight. Yet what advantages will come from those few pillories of shame, in the name of which we are prepared to devastate social ties?⁷

It was clear, though, that some people did see advantages to be gained from "those few pillories of shame." In 2007, Poland's right-leaning populist government succeeded in passing a lustration law that was to take effect that May: all Polish citizens working in government, education, journalism or similar professions had to sign a declaration stating that they had not cooperated with the communist secret police. Those who refused to sign, or who were proven to have lied, were subject to the loss of their positions for ten years. The Institute of National Remembrance was vested with the authority to verify declarations. Those born after 1 August 1972 were exempted - and thus was a single day conjured up as a mark of generational divide. Lustration reflected a public demand for accounting with people like Lesław Maleszka. Victims like Stanisław Pyjas—the proponents of lustration argued—deserved at least this much. Why should those who participated in the crimes of communism be granted impunity?

Yet it was not at all clear that lustration would bring moral clarity. Moreover, lustration was directed, not so subtly, against the former dissidents, many of whom were now on the anti-populist left—after all, they were the ones who had files. It was much safer to have done nothing, to have been of no interest. Lustration, too, was a battle over

⁷ This and previous quotations from Lesław Maleszka, "Byłem Ketmanem," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (13 November 2001).

Solidarity's legacy. Polish Solidarity had been that rare miracle: a true civil society, a coming together of workers and intellectuals, of Marxists and Catholics, of people of the right and people of the left, all united by their opposition to an oppressive regime. That this unity failed to hold after 1989 was perhaps only natural. Former dissidents of the right, like Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, very much resented what they perceived to be the monopoly that former dissidents of the left, like Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron, had over the legacy of Solidarity.

"What explains the inclination, among the former Solidarity opposition, to conduct such brutal settling of scores?" asked Barbara Toruńczyk, herself a member of this former opposition. She continued,

'Nie ma czynu krom przez grzech' ("there is no deed except by sin"), Norwid said, and all of us were to become painfully convinced of the soundness of his words. The division of the human race into incurable sinners and innocents, pure as the avenger's tears, is not self-evident. Yet this novel anthropological thesis has gained widespread popularity. It has found, too, practical application—revealing its adherents' particular relationship towards people: bereft of compassion, characterized by hatred.⁸

There was something else as well, an element wholly absent when Petr Cibulka had published his list in 1992: time had passed. Now there was a new generation calling for lustration, young politicians who could not themselves be implicated, who were protected by what German chancellor Helmut Kohl had called "*die Gnade der späten Geburt*": the grace of late birth. This generation, some have argued, is in fact afflicted by "the gracelessness of late birth": they refuse ambiguity; are eager to dethrone their elders; and reject the modesty suggested by the poet Wisława Szymborska's observation, "*tyle wiemy o sobie, na ile nas sprawdzono.*" We know ourselves only insofar as we have been tested.⁹

⁸ Barbara Toruńczyk, "Opowieść o pokoleniu marca: przesłanie dla nowej lewicy (część druga)," *Krytyka Polityczna* no. 16–17 (Summer 2009).

⁹ The line is from Wisława Szymborska's poem "Minuta ciszy po Ludwice Wawrzyńskiej," published in *Wołanie do Yeti* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957).

Under the 2007 lustration law, everyone of a certain age was considered under suspicion until proven otherwise, pointed out Stanisław Krajewski, a former Solidarity activist and a professor at Warsaw University. In an editorial for *Rzeczpospolita*, Krajewski explained his refusal to sign the declaration: "This is fundamentally a question of taste. Figuratively speaking, I'm to prove that I'm not a camel? Perhaps I should also testify that I'm not a thief or a sexual deviant?" The camel was a Russian reference popular during Stalinist times. "Prove that you're not a camel" expressed the impossibility of proving one's innocence in a system where everyone was always already presumed guilty. The only way to anticipate what might be in one's file was to remember back decades, and guess what the secret police agents were thinking at the time, for now they had become the main source of judgment. "The sinister shadow of the Security Service," Krajewski wrote, "... stands over us in a triumphant pose."¹⁰

Adam Michnik felt very similarly about lustration. "It's impermissible to judge a person on the basis of a single source," he said, "especially a source begot in the worst of intentions."¹¹ Suddenly, fifteen years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, it was the communist secret police functionaries—so many of whom were opportunistic, uneducated, self-interested, or simply not very bright—whose word seemed to count most.

Then, in May 2009, Adam Michnik reconsidered. In an essay titled "Let's open the files," he called for all the files to be made public at once. He had not ceased to regard it as absurd that "our biographies will be written by our mortal enemies." He had not ceased to think it relevant that those secret police functionaries who had tracked and interrogated, blackmailed and imprisoned so many people had not been after empirical truth. Their goal had been precisely to compromise people, to taint them, to humiliate them. And now it was con-

¹⁰ Stanisław Krajewski, "Łamanie kręgosłupów oświadczeniami lustracyjnymi," *Rzeczpospolita*, no. 68 (21 March 2007). Dawid Warszawski [Konstanty Gebert] makes a similar argument—and draws on the same Russian expression—in an editorial for *Gazeta Wyborcza*: Dawid Warszawski, "Nie, nie zamierzam się lustrować," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (12 March 2007).

¹¹ Adam Michnik, "Nowy populizm," paper presented at Yale University (16 April 2007).

tinuing. The current regime at the Institute of National Remembrance, “acting on the directives of their political sponsors, are capable in the course of a single night of finding a ‘hook’ on every one of us. And then the next day the media publicizes these ‘hooks’ *urbi et orbi*. Every one of us can be defamed at any given moment,” he wrote.

The issue was this: it was not the case that the files were currently closed, but rather that the powers that be at the Institute of National Remembrance had privileged access to them. And in this way the files “had become a baseball bat to strike down those who think differently.” Michnik continued:

It’s necessary, finally, to curtail the omnipotence of this nightmarish police of memory and blackmail, for after all this is what the present leadership of the Institute of National Remembrance is. [...] For this reason, today the files should be publically accessible to everyone, with all the terrible consequences of that move. It will be better than the present situation. We have to make the files public in order—this sounds paradoxical—not to live under the rule of the files, which are toyed with, whose contents ‘leak out,’ which are used ostentatiously in a political game.

“I don’t see another way out. Better an end to the horror than a horror without an end,” Michnik concluded.¹² The lustration law was overturned by Poland’s constitutional court at the eleventh hour.

In Pursuit of an Errant Act

Poland’s *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej* (The Institute of National Remembrance, nearly always referred to by its acronym, IPN) which controls the secret police files, came into being as the result of a December 1998 statute. It was charged by the Polish government with the three tasks of collecting and administering the archives of the communist security organs; investigating Nazi and communist crimes against the Polish nation; and conducting educational activity. Today it

¹² Adam Michnik, “Otwórzmy teczki,” *Gazeta Wyborcza* (15 May 2007).

is the caretaker of some 80 kilometers of archives and the employer of over 2,000 people.

IPN's Czech counterpart, the *Český Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů* (The Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes) was established only in 2008, and as of summer 2009 employed 273 people.¹³ Soon after the institute opened, Adam Hradilek, a young historian working there, began investigating the story of an aspiring fighter pilot named Miroslav Dvořáček. When the communists took power in Czechoslovakia in 1948, Dvořáček had been twenty years old. Soon afterwards he was among the nearly one hundred young cadets expelled from the *Letecká vojenská akademie* (Airborne Military Academy) for “lacking a positive attitude” towards the new people's democracy. Subsequently Dvořáček, together with other dismissed cadets, defected to the American occupation zone in Germany and became a courier for the Western-sponsored, anti-communist Czechoslovak intelligence service. The Czech general who recruited the young men promised that, once they had completed their assignments as couriers, he would arrange for them to become military pilots in the West. These young men had been formed by the Second World War. They wanted to fly.

In the West, Miroslav Dvořáček was given some six weeks of training: he was taught how to communicate by Morse code and how to read a map. In December 1949 his instructors gave him a compass, false identification papers, and a bottle of whiskey and sent him across the border. He was twenty-one years old.

Miroslav Dvořáček was not especially experienced at intelligence work. He was also not especially well trained. On his second trip back into Czechoslovakia, in March of 1950, he was riding a tram across the Vltava River in Prague when he noticed on the street an old friend named Iva Militká. They were excited to see each other again.

¹³ For a comparison of lustration and the respective institutes responsible for overseeing the former secret police archives in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, see Martin M. Šimečka, “Archivy jako zbraň: Analýza,” *Respekt* (26 June 2009). About Slovakia's Ústav pamäti národa Šimečka, who himself is from Bratislava, writes, “Je pravda, že práce týchto historiků nenechají nikoho na pochybách, že komunismus byl čiré zlo, zatímco Tisův fašistický režim byl ‘barevnější.’”

Dvořáček got off the tram and went along to her student dormitory, where he left his suitcase in her room before setting off to look for the man he had been sent to contact. In the meantime, Iva Militká told her boyfriend not to come to her room that night, because Dvořáček was visiting. Her boyfriend, not very pleased, mentioned this to another friend in the dormitory. Later in the day Dvořáček returned to Iva Militká's room. There the police arrested him.

Digging around in the archives, the young historian Adam Hradilek found a police document giving the name of the student in the dormitory who had reported Miroslav Dvořáček to the police. It was the friend to whom Iva Militká's boyfriend had complained that day: his name was Milan Kundera. Miroslav Dvořáček might have been executed; in the end he spent fourteen years in communist prison camp.¹⁴

Martin Šimečka, then the editor of the Czech weekly *Respekt*, was the first to publish the story—in a rather more sensationalist way than Adam Hradilek would have liked.¹⁵ Martin Šimečka's colleague Samuel Abrahám—also from Bratislava, of the same generation, a professor of political science and an editor who shared many of Šimečka's democratic commitments—was scandalized. He wrote to Milan Kundera in Paris:

I am utterly shocked by the events concerning your person in the Czech media. I have generally regarded the magazine *Respekt* as a trustworthy journal, but the article written by Hradilek and Tresnak belongs to the worst of tabloid journalism. Everything that bothered them about you and your success is distilled in their article. They entertain no doubts about the allegations, they promptly translated the whole article into English to generate maximum impact abroad, because that is their desired audience. And the fact that the editor-in-chief, Martin M. Šimečka (son of the late dissident and philosopher Milan Šimečka), did not do all

¹⁴ For the detailed version of Miroslav Dvořáček's story, see Adam Hradilek and Martin Tichý, "Osudová mise Moravcova kurýra," *Paměť a dějiny* no. 1 (2009): 72–85.

¹⁵ A. Hradilek and P. Třešňák, "Udání Milana Kundery," *Respekt* no. 42 (13 October 2008).

he could to contact you and give you time to react is his personal and professional failing.¹⁶

And Kundera answered Abrahám: "I did not think it was possible to start such an international persecution on the basis of a single lie."¹⁷

Abrahám was angry, and hurt. He published an essay that was in part an open letter to Martin Šimečka. "*Respekt*, the magazine in which the article was published," Abrahám wrote,

reproduced a facsimile of a police document from 1950. To assure the public that neither the story nor the document was a matter of speculation by the authors, the editor-in-chief, Martin Šimečka, wrote in the editorial of the same issue of the journal: 'We did not search for it, it was revealed to us for reasons that can only be of a metaphysical nature.' Who cares about facts, logic, motivation or what the accused has to say? The journalists do not doubt the 'holy writ' of the communist police from the 1950s.¹⁸

Abrahám could not believe it was possible: Milan Kundera might have been a communist, but after all, he was from a cultured family in Brno, his father was a pianist, he had grown up among the bourgeois intelligentsia, listening to Beethoven and Mozart.¹⁹

Neither to Kundera nor to anyone else, however, did Mozart offer any immunity against Stalinism. In 1950 Milan Kundera, like so many young Czechs whose political consciousness was formed by the West's "betrayal at Munich" and the Nazi occupation that followed, was an impassioned young Stalinist, deeply committed to building communism in Czechoslovakia. In accordance with the worldview that he

¹⁶ Samuel Abrahám, "A Trace of Metaphysics? On the Allegations against Milan Kundera," *Eurozine* (22 October 2008). <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-10-22-abraham-en.html>; accessed 7 October 2009.

¹⁷ Abrahám, "A Trace of Metaphysics?"

¹⁸ Abrahám, "A Trace of Metaphysics?"

¹⁹ See the excellent article by Muriel Blaive, "L'ouverture des archives d'une police politique communiste: le cas tchèque, de Zdena Salivarová à Milan Kundera," in Sonia Combe, ed., *Archives et histoire dans les sociétés postcommunistes* (Paris: La Découverte/BDIC, 2009), 203–25.

himself avowed, entirely publicly, at that time, informing would have been not a crime, but on the contrary, a moral imperative. Moreover, unlike so many other victims of Stalinism imprisoned and executed on false charges of treason and espionage, Miroslav Dvořáček *was* working for foreign intelligence.

Milan Kundera's sympathies in that era were not a secret: his poetry was published in the Stalinist-era literary newspapers. And after all, it was not only Kundera. This was the trajectory of a generation: those born in the 1920s who became the young Stalinists of the 1940s and 1950s, writing court poetry for the Party, and subsequently the revisionist Marxists of the 1960s, working for "socialism with a human face," and finally the dissidents and émigrés of the 1970s and 1980s, articulating the most sophisticated critiques of totalitarianism.²⁰

No one was more aware of this generational trajectory than Milan Kundera. "So the Communists took power in February 1948 with neither bloodshed nor violence," he wrote in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, "but greeted by the cheers of about half the nation. And now, please note: the half that did the cheering was the more dynamic, the more intelligent, the better."²¹ In the following pages of that beautiful and unusual novel, Kundera elaborated on the fate of the bright young people who did the cheering: "Historical events mostly imitate one another without any talent, but it seems to me that in Bohemia history staged an unprecedented experiment. There, things did not go according to the old formula of one group of people (a class, a nation) set against another, but instead people (a generation of men and women) rebelled against their own youth."²² There was more: "If I were to write a novel about that gifted and radical generation, I would call it *In Pursuit of an Errant Act*."²³

²⁰ I tell this story in more detail in "Engineering in the Age of Innocence: A Genealogy of Discourse Inside the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, 1949-1967," *East European Politics and Societies* vol. 12, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 397-441.

²¹ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. (from the French) Aaron Asher (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 10.

²² Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 18.

²³ Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 12.

Of himself and his former comrades Arthur Koestler once wrote, “Each of us carries a skeleton in the cupboard of his conscience; added together they would form galleries of bones more labyrinthine than the Paris catacombs.”²⁴ “My own youth, my own ‘lyrical age’ and poetic activity coincide with the worst period of the Stalinist era,” Kundera told his contemporary and fellow traveler Antonín Liehm in an interview in the mid-1960s.²⁵ In Kundera’s opinion, no one of his generation could really be satisfied with himself. The interview with Liehm was in some way an exception: Kundera, unlike Koestler, tended to avoid addressing this subject in the first person. Kundera’s novels, though, are among the most sensitive and penetrating texts ever written about this painful history.

Martin Šimečka unapologetically stood by not only his decision to publish the article, but also his conviction that Milan Kundera was guilty. After all, there was a document. And the files in the Czech archives, he insisted, were ninety-nine percent trustworthy.²⁶ Yet like Samuel Abrahám’s position, Martin Šimečka’s position, too, was ahistorical: no substantial archive has ever been ninety-nine percent trustworthy; documents always conceal as well as reveal. The author of any given report could always prove to have been manipulative and self-interested, or simply stupid and confused. There is no such thing as a perfectly reliable source, produced outside of time and place and the possibility of human error.

The *Respekt* story caused a scandal both in the Czech Republic and in France, where Kundera has long lived. Yet something about the shock was curious: it was not a secret that Milan Kundera was an unusually gifted writer who in 1950s had been a committed communist. If there were to be a public discussion, the real question should be this: why did the brightest minds of Kundera’s generation become Stalinists in their youth? Why, in the genuinely free elections of 1946, did the communists

²⁴ Arthur Koestler, “The God that Failed,” in Koestler et al., *The God That Failed*, ed. Richard H. Crossman (new edition has a forward by David C. Engerman) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 71.

²⁵ Antonín J. Liehm, *The Politics of Culture*, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: Grove Press, 1968): 142–45, quotation on page 145.

²⁶ “Dilemma 1989” (panel discussion), Eurozine 22nd European Meeting of Cultural Journals: European Histories (Vilnius, 9 May 2009).

in Czechoslovakia win a plurality with thirty-eight percent of the vote? Why after the war was there so much enthusiasm for communism—even as it became increasingly apparent that communism meant Stalinism?²⁷

Martin Šimečka's father had known Milan Kundera well. They were of the same generation—and the same trajectory: young Stalinists-turned-revisionist Marxists-turned-dissidents. Šimečka is a bright man, self-critical and self-questioning; with respect to Stalinism he feels, too, a certain guilt by contiguity. He was close to his father; yet during all the years of intellectual debates about communism between father and son, he never once asked his father if, in the 1950s, he had ever done anything like this—if he had ever gotten his hands dirty. "I never asked because at the time I was not ready for the answer," he wrote.²⁸ And now it was too late. Milan Šimečka died in 1990, less than a year after the Velvet Revolution.

"Historical Policy"

There were still other skeletons in that psychic closet of the repressed. In the spring of 2000, Jan Tomasz Gross published in Polish a small book titled *Sąsiedzi* ("Neighbors"). The book was a microhistory. In it, Gross told the story of the July 1941 German-inspired but Polish-enacted massacre of Jews in a small town in eastern Poland called Jedwabne. What followed was the most important debate about the Holocaust in post-communist Europe. Among the things illuminated was the horrific entanglement of Nazism and Stalinism. Apologists for the massacre in Jedwabne cited Gross's "lack of historical context": specifically, the context of the twenty-one-month-long Soviet occupation that preceded the Wehrmacht's arrival in Jedwabne.²⁹ The subtext

²⁷ On the communist takeover in postwar Czechoslovakia, see Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

²⁸ Martin M. Šimečka, "My Father's Generation," *Salon* (27 November 2008); <http://www.salon.eu.sk/article.php?article=805-my-father-s-generation%E3%80%88=EN>; accessed 8 October 2009.

²⁹ Jan T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Fundacja pogranicze, 2000). The English version appeared a year later: Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne*,

of this historical context was the alleged support of Polish Jews for the new Soviet regime.³⁰

Several years later, in 2006, Gross published a book that was in some way a sequel to *Neighbors. Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz* is a long, reflective essay on postwar antisemitic violence, violence committed against Jewish survivors returning to Poland from the Soviet interior and from the Nazi camps. The central narrative drama in *Fear* is a pogrom that took place just over a year after the Nazis' defeat. The pogrom began with a manufactured provocation: the false accusation that Jews had kidnapped a Christian child. And so it emerged that in Poland in 1946—that is, in Europe after the Second World War—the pre-modern myth of blood libel remained potent—in fact, it remained deadly. On 4 July 1946 forty-two people were killed in the small city of Kielce. One pregnant woman survived, but lost the child she was carrying when her assaulters pierced her uterus. An elderly woman was stoned to death. One man, while being chased by his assailants, dropped his newborn as he ran. The baby was shot in the head at once. Some victims knew their assailants personally.

Fear was a collage of history, moral reflection, and self-criticism. Why—Gross wanted to know—had the Polish intelligentsia, then and

Poland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Jan T. Gross, *Wokół Sąsiadów: Polemiki i wyjaśnienia* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2003); Anna Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Prószyński i s-ka, 2004); Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Marci Shore, "Conversing with Ghosts: Jedwabne, Żydokomuna, and Totalitarianism," *Kritika: Explorations of Russian and Eurasian History* vol. 6, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 345–74.

³⁰ On the participation of Jews in Poland's communist regime, see Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia półprawd 1939-1968* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Stanisław Krajewski, "Jews and Communism," in *From the Polish Underground: Selections from Krytyka 1978–1993*, ed. M. Bernard and H. Szlajfer (State College: Pennsylvania State University, 1996): 353–94; and Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). The complicated story of the participation of Polish Jews in the Polish communist movement and later the communist regime had its epilogue in the "anti-Zionist" campaign of March 1968. See Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska 1967–1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2000).

since then, not seen this? Why had Polish intellectuals—the “conscience of the nation”—not done something, said something?

For Gross the answer, at least in part, was that so many past and present Polish intellectuals—himself very much included—had been “blinded by social distance.” Born into a Warsaw intelligentsia family, Jan Gross had not seen antisemitism when he was growing up in postwar Poland. It had not been part of his world. Now, fighting his way through the “blindness of social distance,” he was confronting a much darker side of Polish society. He hypothesized that the origins of postwar antisemitism were actually to be found in wartime behavior—in particular the “widespread collusion” of the Poles with the Nazis’ extermination project—even if only by passive observation. After all, many Poles were not sorry to see that the Jews were gone; they were quick to appropriate their property. Gross’s point was that postwar antisemitic violence did not occur *in spite of* the Holocaust, but rather *because of it*.³¹

Fear is a poignant book—both compelling and in some way necessarily unsuccessful. For what Gross was truly seeking in writing it was the answer to the question: why was there evil in the world? And to that question there was no answer.

After the publication of *Neighbors*, the Institute of National Remembrance had played an enormously impressive role. Then under the leadership of Leon Kieres, IPN had commissioned over a dozen researchers to investigate the Jedwabne case, subsequently publishing the results of incomparably more extensive archival work than Gross himself had done in two volumes, the first of scholarly articles, the second of documents.³² By the time *Fear* was published, however, IPN was under new leadership. And this time it was to play a very different role. “The state has commissioned historians of the modern period to improve the image of a Polish society that for forty-five years tolerated a regime held in place by a foreign mandate,” wrote Barbara

³¹ Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006). The book was subsequently published in Polish as *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie* (Cracow: Znak, 2008).

³² Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. I “Studia” and vol. II “Dokumenty” (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002).

Toruńczyk. "With this goal it has commandeered a special institute equipped with enormous material resources and supra-constitutional entitlements; scholars employed there are to seek out the guilty, charge them with accusations, and make pronouncements about their crimes against the Polish nation."³³ In 2006, just after the English version of *Fear* appeared, a new statute relating to IPN was debated in the Polish Senate. The statute included the provision: "*Whoever publicly imputes to the Polish nation participation in, organization of, or responsibility for communist or Nazi crimes is liable to up to three years in prison.*"

That September the Polish historian Dariusz Stola published an editorial in *Gazeta Wyborcza* concerning the new statute. Stola warned the legislators who were so concerned with protecting Poland's reputation that this law would have precisely the opposite effect:

The original project authored by the Senate Legislative Office was unambiguous: it enjoined the prosecutor to act in every 'case of imputing to the Nation or the Polish State, or a group of Polish citizens and/or individual persons being Polish citizens.' With this the authors claimed that no Polish citizen has ever taken part in any Nazi or communist crime. [...] As a history professor I hope that such an opinion results only from thoughtlessness, and not from a complete lack of knowledge about Polish history in the twentieth century—or an equally harmful desire to deprive Poles of a fundamental aspect of human dignity: the capacity to choose good or evil. For if neither groups of nor individual Polish citizens had anything to do with these crimes, then why all the ado about the iniquities of the communist regime? After all, all evil deeds were committed by alien creatures of some kind, in all likelihood Martians.³⁴

Shortly after the Polish version of *Fear* was published in January 2008, a Kraków district attorney initiated an inquiry into the book. Eventually the charges were dropped.

³³ Barbara Toruńczyk, "Opowieść o pokoleniu marca: przesłanie dla nowej lewicy (część druga)," *Krytyka Polityczna* no. 16–17 (Summer 2009).

³⁴ Dariusz Stola, "Historycy za kraty," *Gazeta Wyborcza* no. 210 (8 September 2006): 21.

By the time *Fear* appeared in Polish, the historian Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, one of the fiercest critics of *Neighbors*, had already published in *Rzeczpospolita* a review based on the English version. He began by explaining the Western myth that “Poles are pathological antisemites” as the result of Jewish exploitation of censorship in communist Poland: for decades Polish historians had been prevented from propagating their own version of history. The legacy of this censorship continued; and Chodakiewicz bemoaned the fact that Polish historians, with only a handful of exceptions, had not been prepared to defend themselves in the Jedwabne debate.

In Chodakiewicz’s opinion, *Fear*—like *Neighbors*—had to be seen in the context of both Jewish domination of Polish history in the West and the influence of postmodernism in Western intellectual life, which since the 1960s had led to the loss of all standards of historical scholarship. *Fear* followed the postmodernist trend of attacking traditional values like religion and patriotism. Gross was the worst kind of postmodernist: “In his book Gross condemns everything that is not secular, leftist, liberal. The sources of evil, or rather antisemitic old wives’ tales together with the violence resulting from them, are the Christian religion, tradition, and patriotism.”³⁵

IPN’s new president Janusz Kurtyka now called Jan Gross “the vampire of historiography.”³⁶ Kurtyka, together with Chodakiewicz, very much embodied the spirit of IPN in its post-Jedwabne debate turn towards a hardline “*polityka historyczna*” (“historical policy”). Now a liberal Polish columnist named Daniel Passent published a satire of IPN under Janusz Kurtyka’s leadership: if the Institute were to seek a new president, who would be a viable choice? Those on the right would have a reason to oppose all potential candidates: One was a renegade for having left when Janusz Kurtyka appeared. Another had a father who was a communist. Yet another had a husband who was politically involved on the left.

“It looks,” Passent wrote, “like no Pole can be seated upon that barrel of gunpowder that is the Institute of National Remembrance

³⁵ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “Historia jako wycinanka,” *Rzeczpospolita* no. 269 (18 November 2006).

³⁶ Janusz Kurtyka, interview with Konrad Piasecki, RMF FM (10 January 2008).

(unless he were to be an authentic Pole, in the style of Dr. Chodakiewicz), and that it will be necessary to entrust that position to someone unburdened by studies at a totalitarian university with professors who have not undergone lustration, someone uncompromised by collaboration with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, someone who, in addition, need have been conceived in vitro, in order that his father be unknown (and his grandfather from the Wehrmacht as well).³⁷

The Fate of a Futurist

Janusz Kurtyka's new IPN presidency was an activist one, with interventionist inclinations. Kurtyka understood “historical policy” as a way of settling accounts—with the living as well as with the dead. One of those dead was Bruno Jasiński. In the 1920s, Bruno Jasiński had been a bright young man, a futurist poet enamored of Guillaume Apollinaire, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and Vladimir Mayakovsky, a dandy who wore a top hat and a wide tie and a monocle. Together with his futurist friends, Jasiński desired to liberate language from all constraints. He was drawn to transgression, scandal, and the thrill of a new world in which everything was possible. In 1921, at the age of twenty, he published the long poem “But w butonierce” (A Boot in a Buttonhole), which included the confident stanza: “*I’ve squandered my soles in daily hurrying/Now I am sunny, self-assured, and pleased./I, young and ingenious, go, my hands in my pockets/I take mile-long steps, like the world made of suede.*”³⁸

In 1921 the famous avant-garde artist Witkacy painted Jasiński's portrait. A few years later, Bruno Jasiński left Poland for Paris. He lived there for several years, in the lower Montmartre, where he became increasingly convinced of the truth of communism. Eventually he wrote a revolutionary novel, the wild, apocalyptic *I Burn Paris*. For this the French deported him.³⁹ Undaunted, the persecuted revolutionary poet

³⁷ Daniel Passent, “Merci Marci,” *Polityka*, no. 2702 (25 April 2009): 105.

³⁸ Bruno Jasiński, “But w butonierce,” *Poezja polska okresu międzywojennego*, ed. Michał Głowiński, Janusz Sławiński, and Janusz Stradecki (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich), 283.

³⁹ Bruno Jasiński, *Palę Paryż* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1957).

went on to receive a hero's welcome in Leningrad. In the Soviet Union Jasieński wrote the play *The Mannequins' Ball*, also set in Paris. It was communist theater synthesizing futurist and absurdist elements.

In the play, mannequins spent an evening at a fashion house ball, dancing and discussing their superiority to their human counterparts, on whom all fashions would "always look ghastly."⁴⁰ When an uninvited guest, the bourgeois socialist leader Ribandel, accidentally wandered into the fashion house, the mannequins decided to punish the intruder by cutting off his head. Afterwards they drew lots, and the winner appropriated the human head and set off to the auto manufacturer's ball in Ribandel's place.

There at the humans' ball the mannequin-imposter was disgusted to learn that Ribandel, while a socialist, remained inextricably wedded to the decadent bourgeois world. The play concluded when the headless Ribandel stumbled into the auto manufacturer's ball in search of his head. By then his imposter was thrilled to see him.

Please, here's your head! Take it. Take it quickly! I've had enough of it! I was tempted for nothing! When I won the head, I was happy. I thought I'd found a treasure. To hell with your head! Now I know what you need it for! We made the right decision to cut off that bad apple's head. But what's the use? Can we cut off all your heads? There aren't enough scissors. And it's really not our business. Others are coming who can do a better job than we could.⁴¹

The Mannequins' Ball was never performed in the Soviet Union during Bruno Jasieński's lifetime. Despite Jasieński's passionate devotion to the Bolshevik Revolution, in an era of socialist realism his own work remained too fantastical for Soviet approval. His dedication to the Soviet cause never waned, even as he spent the 1930s impoverished, living in a frozen apartment, nervous and afraid. Like so many others—and so many other Polish communists in particular—Jasieński came under attack during the Great Terror. It was 1937. He was arrested and tortured. Broken, he offered his interrogators an elaborate con-

⁴⁰ Bruno Jasieński, *The Mannequins' Ball*, trans. Daniel Gerould (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 11.

⁴¹ Jasieński, *The Mannequins' Ball*, 68.

fession of Polish nationalist sentiments and espionage on behalf of Polish counter-intelligence. Several days later he recanted his testimony. In confessing to crimes he had not committed, he explained, he had hoped to bring himself a speedier death. On 17 September 1938 Bruno Jasiński was executed.⁴²

Stalin died in 1953. During the "Thaw" that followed, Bruno Jasiński was among the many victims of the Terror to be rehabilitated—posthumously. His work was restored to favor. Nearly fifty-five years later—and twenty years after the fall of communism—the Institute of National Remembrance attempted to de-rehabilitate him. In spring 2009, IPN's vice-president Franciszek Gryciuk sent a letter to the town council of Klimontów, the hometown of Bruno Jasiński. It had come to IPN's attention that in this small town there remained a certain street named after Bruno Jasiński—a street that was in effect "a glorification [...] of the politics of Josef Stalin, of the criminal ideology of communism." "I wish to direct attention to the fact," Gryciuk wrote, "that maintaining a name of this type in independent Poland should be considered an action having a negative educational impact; a glorification of a criminal ideology; and a betrayal of the Homeland; as well as a factual encouragement to commit acts violating the Constitution of the Polish Republic."⁴³

The street in question was a small street, on which stood a school, a church, and the house where Jasiński was born. Jasiński's literary fan club drafted a petition in protest. The once futurist poet, the peti-

⁴² Bruno Jasiński, NKVD file, M/III/55, Archiwum Wschodnie, Warsaw. The contents of the file, originally in Russian, have been translated into Polish and published as *Bruno Jasiński w sowieckim więzieniu: aresztowanie, wyrok, śmierć*, ed. Krzysztof Jaworski (Kielce: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Jana Kochanowskiego, 1995). In 2008 a Polish-Jewish monthly devoted a special issue to Bruno Jasiński. See *Midrasz* vol. 6, no. 34 (June 2008). I tell the story of Bruno Jasiński and his milieu in *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). See also Krzysztof Jaworski, *Dandys. Słowo o Brunonie Jasińskim* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2009).

⁴³ Franciszek Gryciuk (Vice-president, Institute of National Remembrance), "Pismo Prezesa Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej do Przewodniczącego Rady Gminy w Klimontowie (woj. świętokrzyskie)," http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/pl/397/9467/Pismo_Prezesa_Institutu_Pamieci_Narodowej_do_Przewodniczacego_Rady_Gminy_w_Klimo.html; accessed 17 April 2009.

tion stated, "is first and foremost an artist and not a political activist." The petition's authors continued:

Even the most virulent critics of Jasieński's work have not managed such a biographical note as came from the pen of IPN's historians. In it there is not a shadow of benevolence or even understanding for a person caught in the gears of the totalitarian system. One can find weak points in the biography of virtually everyone. [...] In the opinion of IPN historians patrons of streets should be without flaws! Bruno Jasieński with certainty does not fulfill such criteria. With his complicated biography he is the perfect admonition against Stalinist totalitarianism. For the errors of his youth he paid the highest price. He spent more than a year in Soviet prisons. He was tortured. He lived through hell on earth. Death for him was a long awaited redemption. [...] Fortunately his poems survived the Stalinist terror. If language is our spiritual Homeland and the testament of our ancestors, then as a poet Jasieński did much more for Poland than have those custodians of patriotism who are presently accusing him.⁴⁴

The older Polish literary critic Edward Balcerzan also stepped forward with a letter of protest:

Was Jasieński a communist? He was an antifascist, a romantic of proletarian revolution, a victim of Soviet pathology, a deeply tragic figure. Painfully sensitive to injury and intolerance, he believed—naïvely?—in a utopia of humanity liberated from national and social conflicts, just as, in the early twentieth century, believed so many of the great thinkers and artists. Anyone unable to distinguish human dreams from brutal totalitarian politics does not understand the twentieth century.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Piotr Banasiak, prezes Zarządu Stowarzyszenia Miłośników Twórczości Brunona Jasieńskiego and Maria Więckowska, członek Zarządu Stowarzyszenia, "Obrona ulicy Brunona Jasieńskiego w Klimontowie," 22 April 2009; <http://www.petycje.pl/petycjeWydruk.php?petycjeid=3995> (accessed 7 October 2009).

⁴⁵ Edward Balcerzan to Rada gminy Klimontów, Poznań, 23 April 2009, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (25–26 April 2009): 4.

On 23 April *Gazeta Wyborcza* published Balcerzan's letter. A day later, IPN's president Janusz Kurtyka apologized to the Klimontów city council and withdrew the Institute's demand.⁴⁶

The following week, Janusz Kurtyka was back in the newspapers. Polish president Lech Kaczyński, one of the identical twins who had led Poland towards populism, towards lustration and "historical policy," had just awarded him a state order. Now President Kaczyński received a letter of protest from the former artistic director of a right-wing tabloid. Janusz Kurtyka, the author of the letter charged, had seduced the author's wife with the aid of the secret police files from IPN. The betrayed husband wrote to the Polish president:

My wife is a well-known journalist for the right-wing press, who in the time of her romance with Mr. Janusz Kurtyka wrote a series of articles concerning lustration and containing material accessible only in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance. I believe that, had he not abused his position, he would not have been able to seduce my wife.⁴⁷

A New Generation

As the twentieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution approached, there was much talk of what the Czechs call an inadequate "*vyrovňování s minulostí*"—an accounting with the past. Why, after two decades, had this accounting still not fully taken place? Among the reasons, perhaps, was both the near impossibility of compensating the victims, and the near impossibility of distinguishing clearly the guilty from the innocent. Several years after the Nazis' defeat, Hannah

⁴⁶ Monika Rosmanowska, "IPN już nie pali Jasińskiego," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (25 April 2009); Janusz Kurtyka (president, IPN), "Pismo Prezesa Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej do Przewodniczącego Rady Gminy w Klimontowie (woj. świętokrzyskie)," http://www.ipn.gov.pl/porta1/pl/397/9467/Pismo_Prezesa_Institutu_Pamieci_Narodowej_do_Przewodniczacego_Rady_Gminy_w_Klimo.html (accessed 7 October 2009).

⁴⁷ Krzysztof Hejke to Lech Kaczyński, Kobylka, 24 April 2009; published in "Kurtyka niegodny orderu, bo uwiódł cudzą żonę?" *Gazeta Wyborcza* (29 April 2009).

Arendt posed the question of how to judge a people “among whom the boundaries dividing criminals from normal persons, the guilty from the innocent, have been so completely effaced.” For it was in the essence of totalitarianism that it “completely destroyed the neutral zone in which the daily life of human beings is ordinarily lived, achiev[ing] the result of making the existence of each individual in Germany depend either upon committing crimes or on complicity in crimes.”⁴⁸

Václav Havel and his fellow Czechoslovak dissidents who wrote in such an elegant existentialist idiom, were never terribly idealistic about “the people.” The tone of Havel’s prose is much gentler than that of Arendt’s, yet the content is equally harsh: Havel knew well that everyone was implicated. “The people” were the greengrocers, who every morning in their shop windows, alongside the onions and tomatoes, displayed the sign “Workers of the World Unite!” It was the greengrocers, even as they failed to take the slogan seriously, who allowed the game to go in the first place. This was Havel’s most haunting indictment in “The Power of the Powerless”:

Thus the conflict between the aims of life and the aims of the system is not a conflict between two socially defined and separate communities; and only a very generalized view (and even that only approximate) permits us to divide society into the rulers and the ruled. Here, by the way, is one of the most important differences between the post-totalitarian system and classical dictatorships, in which this line of conflict can still be drawn according to social class. In the post-totalitarian system, this line runs *de facto* through each person, for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Organized Guilt and Collective Responsibility,” *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2003): 146–56, quotations on page 149 and 148–49, respectively.

⁴⁹ Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” John Keane, ed., *The Power of the Powerless*, ed. (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 1985), 24–96, quotation on page 37. Original title: “*Moc bezmocných*.”

"Where all are guilty," Arendt concluded after the Nazis' defeat, "nobody in the last analysis can be judged."⁵⁰ While the situation under communism, particularly in its last two decades, was perhaps less dramatic than the situation in Nazi Germany, the question remains: when the vast majority was complicitous, how can anyone be held responsible?

In some ways the legacy of the dissidents has become nostalgia for moral purity: the moral purity of speaking truth against power—and of suffering for it. Martin Šimečka pointed out that in 1989 East Europeans had hoped that they would have something to teach Western Europe; they cherished the conviction that the experience of suffering had made them more sensitive, more inquisitive, more intellectual. "Today," Šimečka wrote, "that hope looks pathetic."⁵¹

Šimečka's judgment is perhaps too severe: the legacy of totalitarianism and dissent *has* make an important contribution to European thought, to European post-Marxist thought in particular. The death of European Marxism, which preceded the death of communism-in-practice by some two decades, left in its wake an enormous void. If "post-modernity" can be dated at all, then it can be dated to the invasion of Prague by Warsaw Pact tanks in August 1968, the invasion that killed "socialism with a human face"—and with it the possibility of any grand narratives. If modernity meant a search for a replacement for God in the wake of God's death, then post-modernity has meant a world in which no compensation for God's death is possible—and the consequences of that loss must be absorbed to the fullest. The structures that gave meaning had been found not to hold together, and the loss of faith in Marxism was part of a broader loss of faith that stable, grounding answers were possible. After 1968, European intellectual life was in large part devoted no longer to constructing overarching systems, but rather to taking them apart.

In a world in which there was no *Geist*, no telos, no God—a world in which all grand narratives had failed—East European intellectuals constructed a philosophy of individual freedom and personal responsibility. They taught that even in a post-modern age, all political questions remained not only philosophical, but also moral ones. Inspired

⁵⁰ Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Collective Responsibility," 150.

⁵¹ Martin Šimečka, "Still Not Free," <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-05-29-simecka-en.html> conference (accessed 10 October 2009).

by Sartre and Heidegger, they linked authenticity and morality to articulate a deeply ethical existentialism. “To live in truth” was a moral stance. Even while the dissidents’ seeming monopoly on truth could not sustain itself in the post-communist era, their philosophical contribution to resisting nihilism in a post-modern age should not be underestimated.

Nineteen sixty-eight was a “caesura in consciousness,” wrote Barbara Toruńczyk, who was among the Warsaw university students arrested that year for taking part in demonstrations. Forty years later, the longtime editor of a leading Polish literary journal published an open letter to the young Poles of the “new left.” She wrote about herself and her friends, who had grown up under the influence of Marxism and had gradually watched reality confront ideology. They became fearful of both the collectivist spirit and the desire for grand narratives. They felt a “hunger for personal freedom.” Their challenge, then, was how to abandon grand narratives without abandoning ethical values. They came under the influence of French existentialism, and of the very best of the former Marxists like Jacek Kuroń and Leszek Kołakowski. It was Kołakowski, above all, who guarded them from nihilism, who insisted on always returning to ethics.⁵²

Barbara Toruńczyk dedicated this essay to a young man named Sławomir Sierakowski. Born in 1979, Sierakowski is among the leaders of Poland’s “new left,” gathered around a cultural organization called *Krytyka Polityczna* (Political Critique). And in fact this is a *new* left—not a post-communist left—whose core is composed of people now in their mid-to-late twenties, people too young to have been fully formed by communism. The new leftists associated with *Krytyka Polityczna* are on average just several years younger than the young members of the populist-leaning right who have been active in calling for lustration and “historical policy”—and are in part a reaction against them. Influences on the new left range from nineteenth-century Polish Marxist thinkers (in particular those who died young with clean hands) to the manic Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, whose provocative—sometimes

⁵² Barbara Toruńczyk, “Opowieść o pokoleniu marca: przesłanie dla nowej lewicy (część pierwsza),” *Krytyka Polityczna*, no. 15 (Summer 2008): 208–30.

crazed, sometimes brilliant—blend of Hegel and Lacan takes up virtually all of the intellectual currents of the past century.

In an open reply to Toruńczyk, Sierakowski wrote that Leszek Kołakowski, while his remarkable *oeuvre* remained fundamental reading for the new left, nonetheless deserved criticism, for he failed to guard Toruńczyk's generation from the "Hegelian bite": in this case, a belief in Francis Fukuyama's "end of history"—and with it the end of the politics. Sierakowski added that if the two rebellious generations did not always agree, "[s]urely this is because for us, contemporary capitalist Poland is not a point of arrival but a point of departure. For you it's a reward for years of battle against communism; for us it's a challenge."⁵³

In 2008, nineteen years after the fall of communism, Adam Michnik published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* an interview he conducted with Václav Havel. In the interview, Václav Havel told Adam Michnik that only when a new generation wholly untainted by communism matured would there be a chance to bring new values into public life.⁵⁴ This is perhaps Sierakowski's generation. Too young to have accumulated very many skeletons in their own psychic closets, they are also not especially interested in digging around in the closets of their elders. Rather, the new leftists gathered around *Krytyka Polityczna* share with Toruńczyk, Michnik, Krajewski and their milieu an opposition to "historical policy" and to populism. They share, too, an intellectual tradition of treating political questions as philosophical ones. Yet they reject the dissidents' legacy of "anti-politics." Theirs is, in fact, a generation young enough to have clean hands, but without an aspiration to remain that way: on the contrary, they see a return to political engagement as a moral imperative. This is, perhaps, the "post-post-modern" generation: they want to build something again.

⁵³ Sławomir Sierakowski, "Zakładnicy własnego zwycięstwa," *Krytyka Polityczna*, no. 16–17 (Summer 2009).

⁵⁴ Václav Havel, interview with Adam Michnik, "Rewolucjo ducha, przyjdź," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (15 November 2008).

LAVINIA STAN

*Memory, Justice, and Democratization
in Post-Communism*

The year 1989 remains a remarkable milestone in the history of Eastern Europe, not only because it allowed all countries in the region, with the exception of Albania and Yugoslavia, to transition to democracy and rule of law within the span of just several months, but also because, with their democratization, these countries were for the first time in decades in a position to interrogate themselves honestly and comprehensively about the recent past. True, the past had been examined several decades earlier, during the early stages of communism, when Eastern European authorities condemned Nazi collaborators and sympathizers. But that exercise was tainted by what Helga Welsh presciently called “the politics of the present,” that is, the desire to use investigations to settle scores with political rivals and to weaken anti-communist groups more than a commitment to reveal, to condemn and to renounce the mechanisms of repression, terror, collaboration, and intimidation of the Nazi past.¹ Indeed, a considerable number of Communist Party members and individuals unsympathetic to the Nazis fell prey to the show trials, property confiscation, public recrimination, and reeducation of those times. In 1989, by contrast, Eastern Europe got the chance to move away from politically tainted justice. But did it really do so? Did “the politics of the present” play no role in post-communist transitional justice programs?

This chapter tries to explain the role of the remarkable events of 1989, of the nature of the communist regime, and of the first stages of

¹ Helga Welsh, “Dealing with the Communist Past: Central and East European Experiences after 1990,” *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 48 (1996): 419–28.

democratization in the post-communist pursuit of backward-looking transitional justice, by surveying the theories proposed to date for explaining the progress registered by Eastern Europe in coming to terms with its communist past. During the last two decades, several authors have tried to ascertain why different post-communist countries have responded differently to their communist pasts. Countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were considered ideal from a comparative point of view because they all experienced similar repressive regimes roughly at the same time, and they all effected regime change from communist dictatorship to liberal democracy in the relatively short period between 1989 and 1991. Most of these theories, however, have contrasted the performance of only a handful of post-communist countries, focused primarily on the early 1990s, and reduced transitional justice to lustration, the governmental policy of banning former communist officials and secret agents from being elected or nominated to public posts during post-communist times. Very few authors have considered non-cases (that is, countries that have systematically avoided confronting the past, opting instead for a “forgive and forget” policy), compared all post-communist countries for which data are available, and understood transitional justice as a process going beyond strictly judicial and administrative methods like court proceedings and lustration.

Even the most cursory look reveals that post-communist Eastern Europe is clearly divided between leaders and laggards of transitional justice. On the one hand, Central European countries like the Czech and Slovak Republics and Germany, where communism retained a Stalinist flavor even in its later stages, the regime change was effected through pacted and peaceful revolutions or sudden collapse, and the early 1990s witnessed an alternation of power from the former communists to the pro-democratic opposition, have made remarkable progress in reckoning with their communist human rights abuses. (The role of the German unification in promoting *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* cannot be overlooked, but what is not widely known is the fact that important transitional justice measures were embraced, even before unification, by the East German Volkskammer, the People’s Assembly).² These coun-

² Far from being “an absurdity on the path to German unification,” this parliament established a committee to oversee the breakup of the communist secret political police, the Stasi, and drafted a bill that dealt with access to

tries have adopted a wide range of truth and justice methods, implemented radical lustration and launched several important court trials, and they did all this during the very early stages of post-communist democratization, without much delay and hesitation. The Baltic republics have closely trailed behind Central Europe, but there the process of coming to terms with the past started earlier under the more limited terms of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika policies. Furthermore, the regime change took place two years later than in Central Europe, vetting was mostly effected through citizenship and electoral laws, and non-judicial methods like access to secret files were severely hampered by the transfer of the secret KGB documents to Moscow before and during 1991.

On the other hand, there are Balkan countries like Albania and the former Yugoslav republics, as well as the vast majority of former Soviet republics, where communism was no less strict, but the regime change was either seriously delayed and marred by significant political and ethnic problems or never fully effected, and democratization has faltered ever since. In these countries, transitional justice has been either wild and politically tainted (as in Albania) or remarkably non-existent (as in almost all other countries mentioned above). So as to underscore the importance of democratization to transitional justice, these undemocratic countries have affected no coherent programs of reckoning with the communist past. The progress that former Soviet republics (with the exception of the Baltic states) have made after 1991 in coming to terms with the recent past is dwarfed by their efforts during late communism, because 1991 represented "a within-regime change rather than a regime transition."³ In the former Yugoslavia, the

the secret files that was passed in August 1990 as the Law on the Securing and Use of Individual-Based Data of the Former Ministry of State/Office for National Security. For details, see Gary Bruce, "Germany," in Lavinia Stan, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (London: Routledge, 2009), 18.

³ Jon Elster, *Closing the Books. Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67. We should note some recent development. In January 2010, the Moldovan interim President Mihai Ghimpu created the Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Totalitarian Communist Regime in the Republic of Moldova, as a historical commission mandated to investigate the crimes of the communist regime in that country.

atrocities perpetrated during the 1990s wars took precedence over the communist past, which is yet to be seriously investigated and reckoned with. Even in Slovenia, which obtained its independence in only ten days, the successors to the Communist Party have retained their political clout, rejecting calls for transitional justice.

Between these extremes stands another cluster of countries, where the past has been investigated to a certain extent, but either by using a limited number of methods or by delaying and prolonging their coming to terms with the past, so much so that some of these processes have been rendered meaningless. Redress has been translated into mild lustration, delayed justice, and mostly symbolic gestures. In Hungary and Poland, lustration has been understood as a vetting not of those who acted as the brain and muscle of the communist regime, but rather only of those who chose to hide their past, a gesture interpreted as a betrayal of the new democratic order. Not surprisingly, given the secret character of the personal declarations regarding (non)collaboration with the repressive branch of the communist political police, very few post-communist officials chose to hide their past and even fewer were removed from their public posts as a consequence. In these countries, very few court proceedings were launched and important secret archives remain closed to the public. In Bulgaria, lustration was applied to very limited domains of activity (the academia, the banking system, the intelligence services, but not the public administration) for very limited periods of time, and the continuous public support for leftist social policies has dampened desires to condemn the former regime. While it remains the only Eastern European country to have set up two separate historical commissions, Romania offered public access to secret files only in 2006 and has delayed the implementation of mild lustration to such an extent that the policy has become irrelevant, as most former communist officials and secret agents have already retired from public life.⁴

See "Chișinăul dă startul condamnării comunismului," *Tribuna Basarabiei*, 15 January 2010, available at: <http://www.tribuna-basarabiei.ro/2010/01/chisinaul-da-startul-condamnarii.html> (accessed on 20 March 2010).

⁴ Stan, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, Chapter 6, and Lavinia Stan, "National Report on Romania," part of the "How the Memory of Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes is Dealt

Thus, post-communist transitional justice experiences have come together in three main clusters, ranging from radical to moderate and very mild. The most radical programs have been implemented in the early 1990s by pro-democratic governments with a clear commitment to building new democracies, strengthening the rule of law, and effecting a clear break with the disregard for legality and human rights of former communist regimes. The very mild programs, by contrast, have been delayed by incomplete regime changes, reluctant political elites drawn primarily from the former ruling communist groups, and the weakness of the civil society. The handicap registered by countries in the third category—moderate transitional justice methods—during the early 1990s has never been fully overcome, even when resolute measures were adopted much later in view of reckoning with the past.

Having established the progress to date of post-communist countries, an important question arises: How have 1989 and the democratization of the early 1990s impacted transitional justice in post-communist Eastern Europe? Several authors have proposed the explanatory theories presented below.

Competing Theories of De-Communization

Authors seeking to explain the factors that lie behind the post-communist countries' differences in coming to terms with their communist past have tended to underscore the importance of either the "politics of the past" or the "politics of the present." Only the most recent theoretical frameworks have examined the simultaneous impact of both the past and the present on the pace and scope of post-communist transitional justice. Let me survey key contributions to this literature in the order they were presented, keeping in mind that this overview might not be comprehensive.

In 1991, Samuel Huntington claimed that three types of transition from authoritarian rule characterized the "third wave" of democratization, which included Eastern Europe, and that the outcome of what he

with in the Member States" project, commissioned by the Direction D: Fundamental Rights and Citizenship of the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security of the European Commission, 2009.

termed the “torturer problem” was predicted by the type of transition a society underwent toward democratization.⁵ In the Hungarian and Bulgarian “transformations,” Huntington argued, communist leaders took the lead and changed those regimes into democracies. In the East German and Romanian “replacements,” the communist government lost strength until it collapsed or was overthrown by revolutionary forces. Finally, in the Polish and Czechoslovak “transplacements,” democracy was brought about in negotiations between weak political regimes and weak oppositional forces, because in those countries neither the regime nor the opposition was powerful enough to enforce its vision alone. Huntington found that, in essence, “justice was a function of political power,” and transitional justice was determined by transition type. While officials of regimes that transformed themselves were able to declare amnesties to protect their position, and transplacements involved amnesty as part of the negotiated transition, officials in replaced regimes were not in a position to demand anything. Hence, of all types of transition Huntington identified replacements as most likely to result in the prosecution of authoritarian officials. Consistent with his prediction based on transition type, Huntington observed that “in Eastern Europe, apart from Romania and East Germany, the initial overall tendency was to forgive and forget.”⁶ The weaker an authoritarian regime was at the time of the transfer of power to democratic forces, the more likely officials and collaborators would be held accountable for their acts of oppression.

In 1994, John P. Moran replied to Huntington by arguing that the extent to which a communist country tolerated dissent and emigration determines the scope of transitional justice.⁷ Moran discussed the importance of the psychological variables of “voice” and “exit” in explaining the appetite for vengeance in post-communism.⁸ He found

⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁶ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 228.

⁷ John P. Moran, “The Communist Torturers of Eastern Europe: Prosecute and Punish or Forgive and Forget?” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* vol. 27 (1994): 95–109.

⁸ These concepts were borrowed from A. O. Hirschmann, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

that in Eastern Europe “the tendency to forgive and forget can be found in those countries—Poland, Hungary—where either exit and/or voice were allowed under the former regime. In countries where neither exit nor voice was allowed—Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia—calls for punishment predominated.”⁹ Therefore, the more liberal the communist leaders, the more lenient the citizenry, and the less willing they were to exclude communist leaders and secret agents from post-communist politics through lustration and to bring them to justice. By contrast, Moran suggested, the more a regime silenced dissent and kept its citizens captive in the country, the more inclined the population to seek retribution and hold former communist officials accountable.

More recent analyses moved away from Huntington’s focus on the type of transition represented by the 1989 events and Moran’s focus on the nature of the communist past to emphasize the impact of post-communist political competition. Several different explanations belong to “the politics of the present” category.

Helga Welsh was the first to consider the simultaneous impact of multiple determinants related to both the past and the present. In 1996, she proposed that the “politics of the present” played a greater role than the nature of the communist regime or the exit from communism in determining a country’s choice for or against lustration.¹⁰ After surveying several Eastern European countries, Welsh noted that the reasons for favoring lustration were related to the post-communist party struggle for political power, although calls for banning leaders and spies of the *ancien regime* almost always made reference to the communist past. For Welsh, “the weaker the electoral strength of the former communists, the easier it has been to move ahead with de-communization efforts.”¹¹ The trend, she concluded, resulted in significant country differences. Czechoslovakia could adopt radical lustration early on because the communist camp was weakened and de-legitimized. By contrast, in the Balkan countries of “Bulgaria and Romania, where former communists have continuously been able to garner substantial electoral support, issues of lustration and prosecution of crimes committed under communist rule have added to the

⁹ Moran, “The Communist Torturers of Eastern Europe,” 101.

¹⁰ Welsh, “Dealing with the Communist Past,” 419–28.

¹¹ Welsh, “Dealing with the Communist Past,” 422.

already substantial political polarization.”¹² Welsh discounted the possibility of countries enacting lustration as long as former communists controlled Parliament, the body called to vote in favor of the screening bills, but at the same time she believed that, instead of disappearing as time passed, lustration could become even more salient if used by different post-communist politicians against their political rivals.

Building on Welsh’s theory suggesting that a key factor explaining the progress of transitional justice was the electoral strength of the former communists, British authors Kieran Williams, Aleks Szczerbiak and Brigit Fowler argued that the variables determining lustration legislation in Central Europe were the differing access of former opposition groups to power and their ability to put together a coalition supportive of lustration.¹³ In 2003, the three researchers refined Welsh’s theory by identifying the circumstances in which lustration can be instrumentalized as part of the political game, and by specifying the motives animating advocates of screening procedures. They noted that the countries that pursued lustration more vigorously—the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland—differed in terms of their communist experiences and transition type, but faced identical demands for lustration in the early 1990s. For them, “these demands were translated into legislation at different times, and varied considerably in the range of offices affected and the sanctions imposed.”¹⁴ Because of the pervasive networks of secret informers and the continuous political prominence of unrepentant communist leaders, “many of the political divisions in the newly-democratizing East European societies were expressed by reference to the old regime,” and “attitudes to the past developed into an issue on which parties cooperate and compete.”¹⁵ Therefore, the adoption of a lustration bill depended on the ability of its most ardent advocates to persuade a heterogeneous parliamentary plurality

¹² Welsh, “Dealing with the Communist Past,” 422.

¹³ Kieran Williams, Brigit Fowler and Aleks Szczerbiak, “Explaining Lustration in Central Europe: A ‘Post-Communist Politics’ Approach,” *SEI Working Paper* no. 62 (2003), available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/wp62.pdf> (accessed 2 February 2009).

¹⁴ Williams, Szczerbiak and Fowler, “Explaining Lustration in Central Europe,” 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

that the safeguarding of democracy required it. Whereas Huntington and Moran believed that the past decided the timing and strength of transitional justice, Williams and his colleagues noted that none of the five “sources of the demand for lustration” they identified “had much to do with the nature of the preceding regime or the exit from it.”¹⁶ Lustration could result from public scandals involving the security services, disillusionment with post-communist outcomes among elites, the political needs of the post-communist right, the impact of earlier lustration efforts, or a public demand for information. Whereas Welsh argued that support for lustration could mount primarily from within the ranks of the anti-communist opposition, Williams, Fowler and Szczerbiak recognized lustration as a policy palatable to both former communists and former dissidents. In all three countries, they pointed out, lustration bills were initiated by anti-communist opposition forces, but subsequently had to be modified to become acceptable to a sufficiently large parliamentary majority.

In 2004, Nadya Nedelsky was the first author to factor in the neglected implementation of lustration laws, recognizing that ex-communist countries face tremendous difficulties in enacting any kind of legislation.¹⁷ The comparison of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, two countries that shared a common communist past but had significantly different post-communist experiences after the breakup of the federation in 1993, allowed Nedelsky to account for both the nature of the old regime and the type of exit from communism. Whereas Huntington and Moran considered the past, and Welsh, Williams, Szczerbiak and Fowler considered the present as primary determinants of lustration, Nedelsky drew a link between past and present by arguing that:

A stronger influencing factor affecting lustration, responses to crimes committed under communism, and levels of access to secret police files is represented by the level of the preceding regime’s legitimacy, as indicated during the communist period

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷ Nadya Nedelsky, “Divergent Responses to a Common Past: Transitional Justice in the Czech Republic and Slovakia,” *Theory and Society* vol. 33 (2004): 65–115.

by levels of societal cooptation, opposition or internal exile, and during the post-communist period by levels of elite re-legitimization and public interest in “de-communization.”¹⁸

To prove the validity of her theory outside the Czech and Slovak cases, Nedelsky applied it to Poland, Hungary and Romania, countries with different types of communist regimes that translated into different levels of regime legitimacy in late communism and early post-communism, concluding that legitimacy is a stronger predictor in countries that previously had bureaucratic-authoritarian (Czechoslovakia) or national-accommodative (Hungary, Poland and post-1968 Slovakia) communist regimes than those with patrimonial communism (Romania) in their past.

The following year, in her doctoral thesis defended at Columbia University, Monika Nalepa explained the puzzling behavior of Polish and Hungarian successors to the Communist Parties, which first insisted on immunity from transitional justice as the price of supporting liberalization and democratization, and then implemented the very screening policies they initially opposed.¹⁹ In her study, Nalepa determined that when former communists anticipated losing power to anti-communist forces, as was the case in Hungary in 1994 and Poland in 1997, they tried to appease a pivotal median political party in order to prevent harsher legislation favored by hardline anti-communists. Thus, she concluded, the former communists behaved rationally by initiating less punitive versions of transitional justice than their anti-communist rivals would. For the former communists, support for lustration was not the result of the desire for an honest reexamination of the communist past, which could have publicly exposed their own involvement in human rights trespasses, but a preemptive strategy designed to protect their political careers from more radical policies.

¹⁸ Ibid., 65.

¹⁹ Monika Nalepa, “The Power of Secret Information: Transitional Justice after Communism,” PhD Thesis defended at Columbia University, Department of Political Science, 2005. The thesis was subsequently published as Monika Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Also in 2005, Eva Jaskovska and John Moran re-examined explanatory theories of transitional justice, concluding that available theoretical frameworks were inconclusive because they both relied on a limited subset of post-communist cases and focused on only two dimensions of transitional justice: lustration and prosecutions of former communist leaders.²⁰ To correct these oversights, Jaskovska and Moran examined a previously ignored set of countries, the Baltic republics, and expanded the definition of transitional justice to include not only trials of communist officials involved in human rights violations (what they term criminal adjudication) and lustration (political adjudication), but also court proceedings ruling on the rehabilitation of those unjustly accused of crimes in communist times (also part of criminal adjudication) and restitution of abusively confiscated property (civil adjudication). After applying this framework to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the authors argued that Moran's "pressure cooker" analogy, first proposed in 1994, provided the best point of departure for identifying the determinants of post-communist transitional justice. They went further by suggesting not only that communist-era exit and/or voice provide release valves in post-communism, but also that additional escape valves are represented by the high political legitimacy of the previous communist regime, the replacement of communism with nationalism as the dominant form of political legitimacy, and the torturers' disappearance through death or exile. Unless one of these valves operates to relieve the pressure, the country will arrive at a point at which criminal, civil or political adjudications will be realized. They further admitted that an "untainted, non-communist leadership plays an important role in this process," and "the presence of a large communist party" seems influential in "increasing the likelihood of post-communist retribution."²¹

In 2006, another study examined the implementation of lustration in Germany, the only country where vetting was completely decentralized. After contrasting different sub-federal lustration programs directed against former communist-era police and secret police

²⁰ Eva Jaskovska and John P. Moran, "Justice or Politics? Criminal, Civil and Political Adjudication in the Newly Independent Baltic States," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* vol. 22 (2006): 485–506.

²¹ Jaskovska and Moran, "Justice or Politics?" 501.

agents, Katy Crossley-Frolick concluded that some *Länder* were more unyielding (for example, Saxony), others more lenient (Brandenburg), and still others pursued a middle-course strategy (Berlin).²² Crossley-Frolick explained these differences through geography and state-level political agendas. More specifically,

[...] the German federal system of government may have, *a priori*, established a structural dynamic that inadvertently generated these varied outcomes. By decentralizing the process, the particular social and political contexts of implementation became paramount. The agents responsible for executing the policies acted on the basis of cues and support from state level political leaders and administrative authorities about how stringently or how leniently the measures should be drafted and implemented.”²³

The most recent explanatory framework was proposed in 2009 by Lavinia Stan, who argued that the scope and pace of transitional justice efforts are strongly linked to the relationship between regime and opposition during the communist and post-communist periods.²⁴ After surveying the efforts of all post-communist countries from 1989 to 2007 and examining both the adoption and the implementation of transitional justice legislation in the areas of lustration, court proceedings and access to secret files, Stan concluded that, in a clear pattern throughout Eastern Europe, former communists voted against lustration and file access laws while their opposition provided the impetus for them. The outcome of this struggle was strongly influenced by the composition, orientation, and strength of the opposition, both before and after 1989; the communist regime’s dominant methods of ensuring societal compliance with its rule (repression/cooptation);

²² Katy Crossley-Frolick, “The Devil Is in the Details: The Vetting of East German Police in Post-Unified Germany,” Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting, 2006, available at http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/4/0/0/p140000_index.html (accessed on 2 February 2009).

²³ Crossley-Frolick, “The Devil Is in the Details,” 1.

²⁴ Stan, *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, especially Chapter 11.

and the country's pre-communist level of experience with political pluralism. In the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania - countries with a pre-communist history of strong multi-party politics and where the communist-era opposition was comprised of some combination of dissidents, mass opposition movement members, and internally exiled technocrats - one finds a well-organized, well-educated, potentially powerful alternative elite in the post-communist period. This elite's orientation toward communism's legitimacy was grounded in its experience under that regime. Transitional justice has been far more stringent where communist rule was enforced primarily through repression and ideological rigidity (as in the Czech Republic and East Germany in Eastern Europe, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the former Soviet Union) than in those where it relied more on cooptation and allowed some level of reform (as in Poland, at times, and especially in Hungary). By contrast, where organized opposition toward communism was weak because of a combination of little pre-communist experience with political pluralism (Bulgaria, Romania, the Caucasus and Central Asia) and, in the communist period, the regime's severe repression of any nascent counter-elite (Romania and Albania) and/or successful cooptation of many elites (Slovakia, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and to some extent Romania), in the post-communist period we find a much weaker push toward transitional justice. In these latter cases the former regime's behavior shaped the opposition's post-communist orientation toward it, as transitional justice was pursued more vigorously and successfully where repression rather than cooptation was the primary method of ensuring societal compliance.²⁵

In this second set of countries, communist-successor parties were able to consistently retain power longer after the 1989 revolutions and the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union than in the first set of countries. In these countries, it was later that opposition parties gained sufficient electoral strength to adopt transitional justice legislation (or only to propose it, as in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova). Among second-set countries that adopted such legislation, the categories of former communist officials and secret policemen banned from politics were fewer and the list of state offices closed to them was shorter than in countries with

²⁵ Ibid.

more powerful opposition forces. Moreover, the later a country launched lustration and file access, the more tampered the archives, the harder to identify the individuals involved in past human rights abuses and the more disputed the official findings. Together, Stan argued, the three factors are stronger predictors of the year when lustration and file access laws gained parliamentary approval, the comprehensiveness and stringency of the laws in terms of the social categories targeted and the implications for those who fall within them, and the number of trials against former communist officials and political police agents, than transition type, exit/voice and the “politics of the present,” narrowly defined.²⁶

Conclusion

During the last two decades, several factors have been identified as determinants of post-communist transitional justice, including the pre-communist level of development, the nature of the communist regime and society’s response to it, the type of transition to democracy, and the balance of power between former communist and anticommunist political actors during the early stages of democratization. This literature helps us to understand the different routes post-communist countries have pursued in order to redress their recent pasts, and the relative importance of the 1989 events, the nature of the communist regime and the democratization processes of the early 1990s. Still, the impact of important factors such as political leadership, international pressure, and cross-country emulation would benefit from further rigorous, systematic study, since they have received only scant attention to date. In addition, due to the limitations in data collection, interpretation and analysis, the available studies rely primarily on qualitative, but not quantitative, research, which might help us draw a clearer picture of the interactions between different processes (or might render the analysis completely unintelligible). Above all, we should note that all the above explanations deal with countries that experienced patterns of wide, as opposed to deep, repression, and their relevance to other regions of the world such as Latin America or Africa remains open to question.

²⁶ Ibid.

A. JAMES MCADAMS

*Transitional Justice and the
Politicization of Memory in post-1989
Europe*

In late May 2008, the past came back to haunt Gregor Gysi. Marianne Birthler, the commissioner of Germany's office for the disposition of the files of East Germany's former state security service (Stasi), produced records that confirmed what had long been suspected: Gysi, a former lawyer and the Bundestag *Fraktionschef* of Germany's increasingly popular radical leftist party, Die Linke, had "knowingly and voluntarily" shared information about his clients with the Stasi. This revelation led to a modest inter-party debate about Gysi's suitability to be a member of parliament. Several members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) demanded his resignation. In response, Gysi argued that the case against him was based on a flawed understanding of the role of a lawyer in East Germany. But both he and his critics knew what the battle was really about. By 2008, Die Linke had become the fourth-largest party in the Bundestag and was an active presence in many of the *Länder*. Thus, all of Germany's mainstream parties were pleased to transmute the accusations against Gysi into a compelling lesson for the voting public. Die Linke was unfit to govern, they argued, because its leaders were unwilling to come to terms with their sordid past. Not to be outdone, Die Linke's leaders were equally opportunistic in reacting to these attacks. They sought to transform the Gysi case into "*l'Affaire Gysi*"! The governing parties were, as Gysi himself put it, "distracted by the success of [his] party" and desperately searching for ways to contain its ascendancy. For this reason, he maintained, the Stasi accusations were not about him at all. They were the opening salvos of an epochal battle between the status quo parties of old Germany and a fresh vision of Germany's future.

At least Gysi wanted us to believe that more salvos were coming. In fact, when the federal elections to the Bundestag took place a year and a half later in September 2009 and Die Linke squared off against the CDU, Gysi's Stasi connections came up briefly, but they were only a blip on the radar compared to the weighty issues of domestic economic policy and foreign affairs that separated the two parties. To be sure, a CDU parliamentarian from Berlin, Karl Georg Wellmann, used the moment to equate Die Linke with the East German dictatorship: "They don't say the Stasi was so bad," he claimed. "They think the Wall had some good sides to it. Gysi worked for the Stasi ... in a high level position. I don't trust them, and a lot of Germans don't trust them."¹ But this was not high politics. One way or another, it seemed, the prospects for an "*Affaire Gysi*" had vanished.

Nonetheless, the fact that the event did not amount to all that it was promised to be does not mean that it was insignificant. For at least three reasons, this apparently unremarkable episode in the Federal Republic's history can provide us with insight into the long, strange trip that the theme of "transitional justice" has taken since it first emerged as a burning issue in Eastern Europe in 1989. First, there is the matter of prediction. To listen to the experts back then, one could have assumed that a controversy like that surrounding Gysi would not even come up twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It could not be in the Federal Republic's interest, we were assured, to let the communist past get in the way of the full and efficient incorporation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) into the unified German state. Second, there is the issue of expectations. As interesting as the dispute over Gysi may have been for those observers, such as this writer, who were looking for it, the Eastern Europeans who engaged in the heated debates over the merits of transitional justice in 1989 and 1990 had anticipated much more. Whether they were in East Berlin, Warsaw, Budapest, or Prague, the proponents and opponents of different forms of reckoning with the dictatorial past—criminal trials, political disqualification, property restitution, and truth commissions—had expected a gut-wrenching period of hard decisions and emotional anguish. Yet the attacks on Gysi promised about as much excitement as any routine

¹ CSMonitor.com, September 25, 2009.

debate in the Bundestag. Moreover, they were politically transparent, not transcendent. Finally, we must ponder the future. In the 1990s, the proponents of transitional justice in many, although by no means all, post-communist states had the satisfaction of seeing that measures of some kind were being taken to acknowledge past wrongs. But when one takes into account cases like the Gysi incident, it is hard to be confident that these issues will have any staying power. With every new generation, it seems as though the challenge for policymakers will not be to come to terms with a bygone age. The challenge will be to remember it.

In this essay, I propose to draw upon the example of Gysi's renewed encounter with history to make three general points about transitional justice. First, I will seek to explain why the expectations of learned observers in the early 1990s about the post-communist future were frequently based upon a flawed understanding of the options available to democratic elites. Second, I hope to shed light on why many of these controversies seem to have lost their fire in the 2000s. Finally, once I have considered these two points, I will pose a difficult question: Is transitional justice, once addressed, likely to be less and less relevant to the politics of democratic regimes over time? As I shall suggest, there is no reason to think that the battles over this topic are at an end. Instead, the more important issue is how and to what purpose they are conducted.

The Limits of Rational Action

You can't always get what you want. But sometimes, you find that what you get is not at all what you need. Social scientists and commentators seem to have neglected this maxim when they were suddenly confronted with the emergence of a host of fledgling democracies in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. As they rushed to make sense of the unexpected, they gave in to the temptation of trying to enlighten these countries' new leaders about the best way to deal with long-standing legacies of dictatorship and oppression. The only problem, but a big one, was that they misconstrued the available choices.

To understand this point, it is helpful to put ourselves in the shoes of democratic theorists more than a decade before these events. At this

juncture in another part of the world, history presented scholarship with a tantalizing challenge: to make sense of an earlier democratic cascade, as, one after another, the military regimes that had defined Latin American politics chose to return to the barracks. To explain this remarkable retreat from authoritarianism, social scientists focused on the process of negotiations between the leaders of the old regimes and the reformers who rose to replace them. The key to every successful transition, the experts concluded, had been for the democratizers to persuade the dictators that they would suffer no repercussions for their decision. An important corollary to this argument, however, was that if the aspiring elites failed to keep their part of this bargain, their predecessors would be disposed to force their way back into power.

On the basis of these assumptions, both academics and policymakers reasoned that democratization and transitional justice were potentially mutually-exclusive categories. The rational choice, many reasoned, was to minimize the latter in order to facilitate the former. In a well-known comparative study of new democracies, the political scientist Samuel Huntington observed that in cases in which the long-term viability of a new regime is uncertain, it is unwise to pursue any form of transitional justice: "The political costs of such an effort will outweigh any moral gains."² Similarly, the Chilean lawyer and rights activist José Zalaquett repeatedly underscored the desirability of dealing with the past in ways that bring people together rather than running the risk of creating new wounds. As Zalaquett wrote in the late 1980s, reflecting upon the general implications of his country's transition, "All things being equal, forgiveness and reconciliation are preferable to punishment."³

As things turned out, however, Latin America has generally not been a good model for democratizing states in other parts of the world, especially post-communist regimes.⁴ What Huntington, Zalaquett, and

² Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 231.

³ José Zalaquett, quoted in Alex Boraine, *State Crimes: Punishment or Pardon?* (Wye Center, CO: Aspen Institute, 1989), 11.

⁴ Indeed, these observers' interpretations of the implications of this Latin American model for transitional justice turned out to be flawed as well. The extradition of former military dictator Augusto Pinochet to Chile in 2000 to stand trial for massive human rights violations was only one of many cases in which retrospective justice proved to be alive and well despite rumors to the contrary.

others missed was that few of the new Eastern European democracies were in such advantageous positions to pick and choose their options. In the prescient words of a nineteenth-century historian, their leaders wanted “to make their own history, but they [could] not make it as they [pleased] ... but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁵

This point should have been self-evident to outside observers. In any country that is struggling through a difficult transition, policy-making about weighty issues will rarely take the form of a smorgasbord where one can make one’s choices according to taste or fancy. At best, it is “a slow boring of hard boards” (Max Weber) in which one tries to change what one can but then lives with what one must. At worst, it is an impenetrable barrier.

With the possible exception of Hungary, the post-communist regimes of Eastern Europe have found that getting what they want on the subject of retrospective justice has been much more difficult than they expected. Consider Poland’s experience. In the view of many social scientists and dissident intellectuals, Poland, too, had experienced a “transition by negotiation.” Thus, they reasoned that the country’s leaders would be wise to follow a conciliatory path akin to the Latin American democracies. The problem with this recommendation, however, was that when it was put into effect, the results were less than desirable. In 1989, new Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki proclaimed that his government would draw a “thick line” between the abuses committed under martial law, which would be left in the past, and the immediate demands of democratic transformation. The sentiment may have seemed like a sensible aspiration at the time. But twenty years later, we can see that the attempt to paper over the crimes and abuses of the communist era has been a greater source of controversy for the Polish regime than an opportunity to move forward.

In contrast, Romania’s post-communist government tried a different approach. Rather than taking a clear stand on the desirability of retrospective justice, it pretended that there was no injustice, or at least none involving any of its members, past or present. By the 2000s,

⁵ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm> (accessed October 2010).

however, long after many “transitologists” would have considered the matter relevant, the question of addressing past wrongs reemerged with a fury. No doubt, the denial of historical truth fueled this explosion. In 2006, the parliament of the Council of Europe passed a resolution demanding that Romania take concrete steps to confront its history. Not long thereafter, a special presidential investigatory commission formally condemned the communist regime’s crimes, even to the point of naming current and former members of the Romanian government as perpetrators.⁶

Yet in many ways, the most revealing example of the problem of transitional justice has been presented where it was least expected to arise—Germany. If ever a state was perfectly primed to define the appropriate policies for a transition from communism, it should have been the Federal Republic. In every respect in 1990—economically, politically, administratively, and even psychologically—Bonn seemed to be ideally positioned to dictate the terms of reunification. The East German state was vanishing into thin air. Indeed, pundits continue to draw upon this assumption, declaring Germany to be a “special case” in every meaningful respect. But here as well, the generalizations come up short. The evidence of Stasi complicity in the Gysi case and thousands of other people’s secret-police dossiers meant that the West German government had less control over the issue than its leaders wanted.

From the beginning, officials in Bonn regarded the opening of the files as a mixed blessing.⁷ Given the confusion and turbulence throughout the GDR in the months leading up to national unification, they feared that revelations about the Stasi’s secrets would open old wounds, rather than healing them. As a result, contrary to both popular expectations and the demands of many East German dissidents, West German policymakers were opposed to allowing broad or unconstrained access to these records. Federal Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble stated outright that the Federal Republic had more important tasks to face than stirring up ugly memories of the commu-

⁶ On the commission, which was chaired by the Romanian-American political scientist Vladimir Tismaneanu, see http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/19/world/europe/19romania.html?_r=1 (accessed September 2010).

⁷ A. James McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chapter 3.

nist past. Chancellor Helmut Kohl went further, intimating that if he had his druthers, it would be best to destroy the files.

Yet Schäuble and Kohl recognized that they could do little to dampen demands that they provide some form of access to the records. Too much had happened already. The process had begun between December 1989 and January 1990, when East German protestors overran the offices of the GDR's state security service (MfS) in cities throughout the country, including the agency's headquarters in Berlin, and established *de facto* control over their holdings. It was not long before tens of thousands of surveillance reports and other documents were flooding into the hands of ordinary citizens. Understandably, they wanted to know what had been done to them over decades of national division. In many cases, they also wanted to make sure that the wrongdoers were held to account for their offenses. As a result, when West German officials arrived on the scene and contemplated the disposition of these records, they could not put the genie of oppression back into the box.

In this light, the Federal Republic's leaders did the next best thing. They drafted a statute, the Stasi-Records Law, which spelled out both how and under what circumstances the files could be used, and they set up administrative offices, like that occupied by commissioner Birthler, to ensure that these standards were observed. At this point, we return to Gysi's predicament. For 19 years, Die Linke's star player had been able to dodge rumors and accusations about his involvement with the Stasi. But in the end, the records' existence meant that it did not really matter whether two weeks or two decades elapsed before his deeds caught up with him.

The Loss of Drama

If Gysi's story demonstrates that the passage of time does not necessarily hide all blemishes, it is equally important to ask why the confirmation of his complicity with the secret police should have apparently meant so little. One could answer this question by arguing that Gysi's transgressions were simply not worth remembering. But this assertion would be unfair to the clients who counted upon his objectivity and independence from the state. A different answer, which I find more

compelling, is to be found in our expectations. When we look closely, it turns out that even in cases of deep violations of trust and integrity, the pursuit of justice is often less satisfying than either its advocates hope for or its opponents fear.

Certainly, this answer would not have been welcome news to those East German dissidents and regime critics who waged a moral campaign over this subject in the early 1990s. To listen to the participants, one would have thought that the prospects for German reunification depended upon the ability of the GDR's former citizens to make peace with each other first. Thus, for these activists, the opening of the files was an invaluable opportunity to use the truths within their pages to promote this goal.

One such proponent was Joachim Gauck, a Lutheran pastor and Birthler's predecessor in charge of the MfS holdings. In a book of interviews compiled during the first year of unification, *Die Stasi-Akten: Das unheimliche Erbe der DDR*, Gauck argued that there would be no meaningful reconciliation among the people of East Germany until they had all faced up to the "psychic chains and tethers of dictatorship." Among these infirmities, he included the "entanglements and injuries [that they inflicted on others], as well as the ancient and long-standing fears, nightmares, and anger that they so quickly concealed and repressed after the toppling of the [communist regime]."⁸ Gauck placed the main burden of responsibility in this "process of reconciliation with oneself" on the shoulders of the Stasi's former collaborators and officers. In his eyes, the wrongdoers were obliged to expose themselves to the full force of public scrutiny and criticism. Only when they honestly admitted to their failings and acknowledged the hard evidence against them would they have a chance to find their place in the new social order.⁹

Another pastor, Friedrich Schorlemmer, took a broader view. In principle, he did not disagree with Gauck about the desirability of encouraging offenders to admit their mistakes and shortcomings. Yet, Schorlemmer also argued that the challenge of coming to terms with a difficult past required the participation of all parties. "Reconciliation

⁸ Joachim Gauck, *Die Stasi-Akten: Das unheimliche Erbe der DDR* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1991), 98–100.

⁹ Ibid.

can only succeed,” he maintained, “when there is a readiness on both sides to speak in an open and differentiated manner about who did, or failed to do, what to whom.” To be sure, this meant recognizing the victims’ demands for justice. But, Schorlemmer added, it was also important that those being held responsible for their failings not feel “hopelessly closed out of [the new order].”¹⁰

From a philosophical and even theological perspective, the two pastors’ prescriptions were attractive. They envisioned a world in which individual fulfillment would be realized through communitarian discourse. Nevertheless, when one considers the high demands that they were making, it is not hard to see why those whom they were seeking to advise were bound to disappoint them. For victims and wrongdoers alike, resignation and not reconciliation has all too often been the only available response to adversity.

Let us imagine the challenge faced by a hypothetical victim. Having just finished reading her personal dossier in Berlin’s Stasi depository, our victim is in agony over the discovery that one of her oldest friends and confidantes had routinely provided details about her private life to the police. At first, she vents her anger and disappointment by refusing to have anything to do with her erstwhile companion. But after a few months, her friend comes to her, tearfully apologizes for her betrayal, and begs forgiveness. Together, they share an awkward moment of reunion. Yet once she has followed the course recommended by Gauck and Schorlemmer, what does the victim do next? Chances are that unless she has a saintly disposition, she will never be able to look at her friend in the same way again. Of course, she will probably decide at some point that she cannot allow this perfidy to remain a defining element of her life. But this does not mean she will ever get over the pain she feels when the subject arises. She will simply learn to live with it.

Conversely, let us imagine the situation from the friend’s perspective. On one level, our wrongdoer can completely understand the victim’s anger. She would undoubtedly feel the same way if the situation had been the reverse. Still, on a different level, perhaps she wonders why her former friend is not making a greater effort to restore the bond

¹⁰ Friedrich Schorlemmer, “Versöhnung heißt nicht ‘Schwamm drüber,’” in Marion Dönhoff et al., eds., *Weil das Land Versöhnung braucht* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), 53–54.

that once linked them together. Isn't friendship all about forgiveness, she asks herself? And, had she not owned up to her infidelity? As a result, she too will have to live with the damage she hoped to repair. There is no emotional release for her in seeking to move beyond the past, only the dull reality of coping with the present.

The failure to achieve closure in this hypothetical instance of personal betrayal would have a numbing impact upon any person. If these women came up short, how then could one reasonably expect to locate much drama in the matter of Gregor Gysi?

Transitional Justice and Historical Memory

At this juncture, the reader may feel that I have placed him or her into an odd position. I began this essay with a recent episode in the long chronicle of transitional justice. But then, I made two general arguments about Germany's reckoning with the GDR's legacy that seem to render that case insignificant. First, I suggested that German decision-makers did not so much choose to achieve justice in facilitating access to the Stasi files. Rather, the demand for justice forced itself upon them. Second, I contended that whatever measures were taken to respond to this challenge, they would rarely be as satisfying or as meaningful as they were meant to be. After twenty years, do these conclusions mean that it is time to stop talking about the Gysis of post-communist Europe?

The answer to this question depends upon what we mean to accomplish. On the one hand, there is nothing in principle that should prevent one from investigating, say, the concealment of grievous human rights violations under an authoritarian government. But on the other hand, as I have already suggested at the beginning of this essay, the battle between Die Linke's leader and his CDU adversaries had almost everything to do with politics and very little to do with justice. To the extent that the latter issue even arose, it was transitional justice as a cliché. All that was required of Die Linke's opponents, it seemed, was to invoke the word "Stasi" and their work was done. In this respect, Germany was by no means unique. In other parts of the former Soviet bloc, the words were different—"StB," "UB," "Sigurnost," "Securitate"—but the intent to secure political capital was the same.

This insight brings us to a second question. Given the time elapsed since the democratizing regimes of East Europe first began to wrestle with the misdeeds of their predecessors, why should we even care when aspects of the communist era are subject to political manipulation? The pursuit of transitional justice happens to provide an instructive response to this query. Every judgment we make about an individual's behavior carries with it the possibility of altering the memory of the past. When these judgments are based upon a conscientious examination of the evidence and due consideration of the reasons for making them, the record will speak for itself. But when they are based upon formulaic thinking and opportunistic motives, our ability to distinguish between what really happened under decades of dictatorship and what others want us to believe is impaired.

The world may forget Gregor Gysi. But to capture the significance of these matters, let us up the ante by considering the case of Lech Wałęsa, one of the principal—if not *the* principal—protagonists in the death of communism. Throughout his tenure as Poland's first post-communist president and virtually up to the current day, Wałęsa has been dogged by accusations that he acted as an informer for the secret police, the SB, during the early 1970s. We may never know for sure whether the claims against Wałęsa are accurate; his detractors insist that the evidence is indisputable, while he counters that it is fabricated. For our purposes, however, the telling aspect of these charges is that on more than one occasion (e.g., the lead-up to the 2000 elections), party politics and truth have melded indistinguishably into each other. Wałęsa, the man, may be able to escape the words that have been used against him. Indeed, the hero of the August 1980 strikes in the Gdańsk shipyards has defiantly declared that his best defense will be to leave Poland forever! Still, the instrumentalization of the charges against him could have the unintended consequence of lessening one of the greatest achievements in Polish history. Far from furthering the cause of justice, a tarnished Wałęsa could adversely affect future generations' memory of the independent trade-union movement that he founded.

Finally, the politicization of transitional justice reminds us of the pernicious effects that this kind of thinking can have in the present. Whatever the issue, when partisan calculations induce a country's leaders to become reflexive, and not reflective, they sully an essential feature of democratic life. By cheapening the power of words, they

make it more difficult for politicians to engage in reasoned dialogue about complex and contentious issues. When one personality begins a debate with a cliché, it is hard for another to respond with an original thought. As a result, when these exchanges become habit, public confidence in democracy erodes. In making these points, I do not mean to say that controversial topics such as the one I have discussed in this essay should be avoided. To the contrary, there is no statute of limitations governing the pursuit of justice, as the long-standing American debate over the moral implications of slavery attests. Rather, I only mean to suggest that these issues should be broached with the care and authenticity they deserve.

TOM GALLAGHER

*Incredible Voyage:
Romania's Communist Heirs Adapt
and Survive After 1989*

Twenty Years On: The View from November 2009

State institutions have a provisional character in Romania despite a decade of “modernisation” and “reform,” supposedly carried out under the auspices of the European Union. A primitive warfare for positions appears to be the only regular form of political activity on a barren landscape. Much of the economy is privatised while heavily influenced by interlocking political and economic groups often given the term “the oligarchy.” Within society and even among educated people located in the liberal professions, a sense of abandonment and isolation is palpable.¹ The impact of major democracies and progressive intellectual currents from Romania’s own past, as well as from abroad, on thought and practice in the political sphere is faint.² Not since communist times has the intellectual world appeared so stagnant. Forces which were once seen as instruments of modernisation and political renewal—civil society, the university world, the media—have fallen short of their potential or else have been colonised by the oligarchy.

There is evidence that President Traian Băsescu has tried to block the further entrenchment of the oligarchy in politics and the economy.

¹ See the article by one of Romania’s foremost writers, Mircea Cărtărescu, “Falimentul nostrum moral,” *Evenimentul Zile* 2 November 2007.

² An exception is the Institute for Popular Studies (IPS), a think-tank linked to the Party of Liberal Democracy and which has held numerous events looking at some of the main reform challenges in Romania since its foundation in 2007. See www.ips.ro.

He has been opposed by trans-party interests, which have dominated Parliament since his election in 2004.³ Even after his narrow re-election on 6 December 2009, his prospects appear uncertain given the strength of his opponents.

Arguably, still the only truly successful politician in Romania is Ion Iliescu (if success is measured by being responsible for devising the country's political structures and their implementation). He celebrated his 80th birthday on 3 March 2010, three months after the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the ambiguous and still-contested set of events known as the Romanian Revolution, which brought him to prominence.

Why, more than any other East European figure active in communist politics, has Iliescu enjoyed such staying power? He is the architect of the political system—the creator of its rules, the definer of its goals—which functions today and whose demise does not appear to be imminent. It was a hybrid and adaptable one with outwardly democratic features, but designed in such a way as to foil any change that threatened the hold on power of a recycled elite sponsored by him. Iliescu and his team were hopeless administrators unable to accomplish the modernization of the country. But such modernization was never really on their agenda. Instead, they were skilful masters of maneuver at a time of transition when the rules for governing states and those for managing inter-state relations were changing due to the abrupt end of communism over almost half of Europe. He preserved and upgraded aspects of the communist system in order that they would be the basis of the supposedly plural and representative regime in place today.⁴

Ion Iliescu still remains a key voice in the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the lineal successor of the communist party. It has experimented with opposition and (until 2009–10 at least) emerged reinforced by the failure of its weaker rivals to uproot its sources of influence within the state. It has adapted itself to situations that appeared to

³ The role of parliament as a nucleus of anti-reform sentiment is conveyed in the article by Paul-Dragoș Aligică and Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Romania's Parliamentary Putsch," *Wall Street Journal* (21 April 2007).

⁴ See Tom Gallagher, *Theft of a Nation: Romania since Communism* (London: Hurst and Co, 2005), especially chapters 3 and 4.

pose a mortal danger to its survival: as well as opposition, privatization of huge swathes of the state, entry into NATO, and engagement with the European Union. Probably its greatest achievement was draining the process of Europeanization of nearly all progressive content and forcing the EU to accept Romania as its 27th member in 2007 on an extremely limited agenda of change. The EU now provides unparalleled opportunities for an adaptable elite to acquire fresh legitimacy, new sources of material wealth, and perhaps even geopolitical leverage.

1989 Changeover

The subject of fierce dispute, the events of December 1989 have been unable to act as a foundation event offering legitimacy for a new post-authoritarian political system. Deeply troubling and divisive incidents, leading to substantial loss of life, turned the revolution into a disputed phenomenon which contributed to the polarization of the country in the years ahead. Very few have needed to answer before a court of law for their role in events between 16 and 25 December 1989, which culminated in the hurried execution of the dictatorial duo Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu.

For understanding of some of the roots of the current malaise, it is necessary to dig deeper into the nature of the communist past and the impact of the 1948-89 era on the population in contemporary times. Millions of Romanians became used to relations of dependency with the state and its representatives. Romania was under an ideologically-based system of stifling political and cultural control overlain by a command economy. A sense of popular compliance also sprang from the degree of suffering they had experienced during the first decade of communist rule and again in the 1980s, when Ceaușescu imposed huge privations on society in order to pay off a large foreign debt.⁵ By then, a system of personal dictatorship was being kept in place by a clique of corrupt sycophants who had deprived the party structures of

⁵ The most authoritative account so far to appear in English of the entire period of communist dictatorship in English is Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism For All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Stanford: University of California Press, 2003).

any real decision-making role. They were equated with the entire communist party and when they were detained and the dictatorship ended, their successors proclaimed that communism itself had been terminated.⁶

But, what were the objectives of those who played a central role in the events at the end of 1989? I believe that they can roughly be listed as follows:

1. *Decisively curtail the power of Ceaușescu and any attempt by loyalists to cling to power.* It was assumed that the most effective step was to execute the ruling duo after a hastily-convened trial. The absence of a proper judicial process meant that they would not have the chance to defend their conduct and record the past of some of the prominent figures implicated in their removal.⁷
2. *Prevent popular unrest and demobilize those forces which had taken to the streets.* This was accomplished everywhere except in Timișoara, where a disciplined and popular movement, whose principal demand was that figures prominent in the communist period be debarred from holding public office, was a thorn in the side of post-communists for several years.
3. *Re-establish authority in new conditions.* Second-ranking party and state functionaries were utilized in order to carry out a range of tasks that would enable the new ruling group to fill the political vacuum and overwhelm rivals who had different ideas for the future. These ranged from re-stocking shops with basic goods in order to win popular trust to sowing mistrust in ethnically-mixed parts of Transylvania, where the organizational strength displayed by the Hungarian minority meant that a danger existed that the cadres imposed by the Ceaușescu regime to supervise minority life might collapse.

⁶ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Romanian Exceptionalism? Democracy, Ethnocracy and Uncertain Pluralism in Post-Ceaușescu Romania," in Bruce Parrott and Karen Dawisha, eds., *Politics, Power and the Struggle for Democracy in South-East-Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 409.

⁷ Peter Siani-Davis, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (New Haven: Cornell University Press, 2005) has perhaps the most detailed account of the events leading up their execution in English.

4. *Revamp forces of control under new guises.* Inevitably, this meant a prominent role for the intelligence services even though they had been the most influential and feared part of Ceaușescu's armory of control. A new domestic intelligence body, the Romanian Information Service, was set up very quickly after the March 1990 inter-ethnic disturbances in Târgu Mureș in which the hand of the secret services had been evident.⁸ The need to prevent other outbreaks of popular violence was cited as the reason, one of the early examples of the double-speak which would characterize the moves made by Iliescu to create a post-communist system defined as much by continuity as by change.
5. *Establish a grip over a domestic media no longer under strict totalitarian control.* This was imperative given the decision made in February 1990 to hold early elections in May with Iliescu's platform, the National Salvation front (FSN), as a participant. Western-orientated newspapers came into existence at this time. But many media outlets, particularly television, defamed opposition forces and transmitted anti-Western sentiments in order to reinforce the distrust of rapid and unsettling change among the bulk of voters.⁹
6. *Prevent forces inspired by Western democratic models from acquiring a foothold in key non-political institutions.*

More covertly, moves were made to prevent institutions lacking a political function becoming a stronghold for ideas and practices at variance with those of Iliescu and the FSN. The Romanian Academy was hastily reconstituted and intellectuals who had opposed Ceaușescu and were prominent in post-1989 efforts to democratise Romania were excluded. Twenty years later, with its membership still heavily drawn from figures reliant on patronage from an unreformed state, it hosted an event called "X-Ray of a Miracle: The fall of Communism in Europe." The keynote speaker was Ion Iliescu, who addressed a gath-

⁸ See Dennis Deletant, "The Post-Communist Security Services in Romania," in Rebecca Haynes, ed., *Occasional Papers in Romanian Studies* no. 2 (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1998).

⁹ For these elections, see chapter 4 of Tom Gallagher, *Romania after Ceaușescu: The Politics of Intolerance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

ering convened by the Academy's National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism on 11 September 2009.¹⁰

Strategically, the necessity of ensuring that higher education did not become a rival pole of legitimacy undermining the authority of the post-communist system was even more important. Pseudo-universities were set up by pre-1989 functionaries and others with money and connections. The Spiru Haret University, whose patron was Augustin Bondrea, a prominent former communist official shaping education policy under Ceaușescu, proved to be the most successful. By 2009, it had become a huge economic empire awarding hundreds of thousands of degrees annually, in the process severely compromising the reputation of Romanian higher education.

Another important set of institutions whose modernisation was vital if Romania was to build a transparent and deficient free enterprise system was to be found in the banking sector. A succession of private banks was formed which misappropriated their customers' investments. Meanwhile, a major state bank like Bancorex issued a serious of soft loans, mainly to those close to the new political order, which were covered by the state. Few fraudulent private bank chiefs faced prison even if condemned by courts of law and it was the taxpayer who was usually required to pay for this financial debauchery.¹¹

7. Manage change in the countryside to suit the interests of those in control of the collectivised agricultural system.

Most Romanians still lived in the countryside despite the frantic industrialisation drives which had occurred from the late 1950s onwards. Iliescu personally intervened to limit the amount of land that could be restored to former peasant owners and their descendants to amounts that made commercial farming unviable.¹² The absence of a national

¹⁰ Since 2007, Iliescu has had his own blog, which is entitled "Echilibru." This information is contained in the entry for 12 October 2009. See <http://ionilii-escu.wordpress.com>, Echilibru (accessed 12 October 2009).

¹¹ See Gallagher, *Theft of a Nation*, 220–21.

¹² For the stark challenges posed by rural Romania after 1989, see A.L. Cartwright, *The Return of the Peasant: Land Reform in Post-Communist Romania* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001).

market for their produce also impeded small- and medium-sized farming. The close relationship between state farms and food processing companies kept such access beyond their reach. Instead, the communist rural bureaucracy often distributed land to themselves and their clients. This was facilitated by a 1991 law setting an upper limit of land to be restituted to former owners of only ten hectares. The restitution committees were dominated by ex-communist mayors, who controlled the property archives and had the legal power to decide over restitution matters. Later, when the opening up of farming to capitalism occurred, these fixers with roots usually in the old system acquired the right to rent high-yield land in a mock privatization of collective farms. In too many cases, compliant courts then gave them the title deeds.¹³

By 1990, it was starting to become clear that a primary goal of the new regime was to rule out any normalisation of conditions along recognisably Western pluralist lines and disable or deform those institutions capable, if left to themselves, of enabling Romania to recover from the profound malformations of the communist era. Members of the party and state apparatus who may have feared for their positions, or even their liberty, if the demands of the Timișoara movement had won strong nationwide support, grew in confidence as the FSN proved capable of filling the state vacuum in the first months of 1990.

Much of population proved compliant. Only a minority was ready to assume the role of active citizens ready to hold their rulers to account. Most were comfortable with paternalistic rule in which they were granted a few of the material improvements that had already occurred in countries like Hungary and Poland during the later stages of communist rule. Iliescu “the good father” seemed a tremendous advance over Ceaușescu “the bad father.”

Political awareness would rapidly increase beyond the small number, probably fewer than ten percent, who, in 1990, had concluded that Iliescu’s model for Romania chiefly benefited the party and state apparatus which continued to function under the surface. But the

¹³ For the most spectacular winners in the bid to carve out huge landed estates in post-1989 Romania, see “Latifundarii României,” *Evenimentul Zilei* (25 October 2007); and also “Stăpânii Deltei,” *Hotnews* (19 September 2005).

decades ahead revealed just how vulnerable big swathes of the population were to various forms of manipulation, ranging from the ultra-nationalism promoted in the Ceaușescu era, to financial scams like the Caritas affair of 1993–94, which saw much of the population's private savings swallowed up by a crock bank that offered unrealistic rates of interest, to the crude manipulation of present-day television channels owned by moguls whose programmes often seemed designed to keep much of the population in a semi-vegetative state.¹⁴

The men of the old structures seeking to prolong their influence in new times were also encouraged by the usually low-key and reactive response of international institutions and major Western states. Only when Iliescu summoned an army of coalminers to Bucharest in June 1990 to drive opponents from the streets and carry out a brief reign of terror in order to affirm his authority, did forceful reactions emanate from the USA and the European Union. But over the next two decades, only a tiny number of diplomats or officials from the European Union seemed able to appreciate that what Romania was witnessing might be something more sinister than a painfully long-drawn-out effort to build a recognisably Western system of law-based pluralist government.

The huge scale of the electoral victory enjoyed by the FSN in May 1990 removed inhibitions about restoring figures from the past to positions of respect and authority. A five-year period ensued of collaboration with the ultra-nationalist ideologue Corneliu Vadim Tudor. His crude and uninhibited attacks on opposition political and cultural figures made him a useful if volatile ally for those in power. Ruling formations intent on converting political strength into economic power needed noisy populists able to divert attention away from the plunder of state assets, towards disloyal minorities or scheming neighbouring states. Opposition parties with a Western orientation sometimes blended anti-communist rhetoric with nationalist demagoguery. Their defeat in parliamentary and presidential elections held in 1992 showed that much of the electorate did not take them seriously as an alternative ruling force to the FSN, which was on the verge of metamor-

¹⁴ For Caritas, see Gallagher, *Romania after Ceaușescu*, 220–22; for the media see “Romanian Broadcasting: Playground for Political and Business Interests,” *Open Society Institute* (Bucharest, 19 May 2008).

phosing into the Party of Romanian Social Democracy. An introspective opposition, which only put aside factional rivalries after 1992, lacked the energy or awareness to see the degree to which some of the most retrograde forces from the Ceaușescu era were enjoying a comeback. Members of the pre-1989 administrative apparatus enjoyed generous pensions and access to a network of hospitals, spas and rest homes. This was in contrast to the bulk of the elderly whose meagre pensions failed to shield them from runaway inflation and the gradual removal of subsidies on basic food items and energy supplies. (By 2000, 92 percent of Romania's six million pensioners were living below subsistence levels).¹⁵ The privileged position enjoyed even by some of the most feared members of Ceaușescu's secret police was shown at the funeral of Dumitru Pleșiță in September 2009. This unrepentant torturer spent his final days in a hospital of the domestic intelligence service (SRI), even though the latter was supposed to have no connection with its dictatorial predecessors, and the army was represented at his funeral.¹⁶

It was hard to argue that Romania had witnessed genuine de-communisation when such scenes were able to occur near the twentieth anniversary of the 1989 overthrow of Ceaușescu. The fate of just one initiative, meant to shed light on the pre-1989 era and the role played by figures prominent in contemporary affairs, illustrates the reluctance of the new elite to allow any kind of reckoning to be made with a dictatorial past. The National Council for the Supervision of the Securitate Archives was effectively disabled by Parliament in 2008 after it had ruled that Dan Voiculescu, who owns the most influential media trust in the country and is a parliamentary deputy, was an informer before 1989.¹⁷

The 1991 Constitution (revised in 2004) established a bicameral parliament which shared power with an elected Head of State. Care was taken to ensure that Parliament would not assume a representative function on behalf of 22 million citizens, but instead would be a forum where members of the new elite bargained for preferment with

¹⁵ *Romania, Country Report, 4th Quarter of 2000* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2000).

¹⁶ See Vladimir Tismaneanu, "N. Pleșiță, zelotul Securității, o instituție criminală," in *Despre 1989: Naufragiul Utopiei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009), 111–13.

¹⁷ BBC Romanian service (31 January 2008).

the Head of state arbitrating between them. Parties were composed of factions, many of whose members changed sides unmindful of ideologies, manifestos or programs. The parties only showed discipline when there appeared a risk that the privileges they enjoyed before the law and in relation to the state budget might be pruned. Iliescu and his allies ensured that the Constitution was the prototype for ambiguous and contradictory laws determining the behavior of numerous other institutions, which impeded effective government. They came to terms with the end of single-party communism and a state-controlled economy by creating weak political, administrative and economic institutions, which provided a source of influence and wealth for the power networks which grew up in the shadow of the FSN and its successors. But the state's institutions and agencies were usually incapable of launching effective modernization, having not been set up or revamped with such an object in mind.

There was breathtaking incompetence in the routine management of the state. Iliescu and his allies retained control of a fluid situation by ensuring that change of any significance could only arise through obeying the vast amount of procedures and laws which have always shaped the way that the bureaucratic world operates in Romania. He also relied on figures from the justice system to the police and key ministries, such as interior, who built up an intricate network of contacts across state institutions. Not all of these figures were influential before 1989. Cătălin Voicu was a young army lieutenant captain at that time who had been involved in attacking anti-communist demonstrators in Bucharest on 21 December. His immediate superiors then switched sides and gave vital support to Iliescu before his power had been consolidated. They rose to enjoy positions of authority in several of the main intelligence services and Voicu's ascent began, hastened by his association with Viorel Hrebenciuc, the most capable of the PSD powerbrokers.¹⁸ Iliescu denied knowing this controversial figure, even though they had been fellow parliamentarians from 1996 and by 2004 Voicu had moved from Hrebenciuc's fiefdom in the northeast to be a Bucharest Senator. His arrest and apparent fall from grace in late 2009

¹⁸ For this episode, see the Bucharest press of 22 and 23 March 2010, especially *Romania Libera* of 23 March.

shed important light on how supposedly independent branches of the state, such as the judiciary, were being manipulated by power networks even during periods when the PSD was in opposition.¹⁹

Once it became obvious (from around 1993) that there might be a place after all for Romania in the new Euro-Atlantic economic and security institutions moving eastwards, there was growing Western pressure to hasten change and improve the management of an unwieldy state structure. Teamwork, delegation, consultation, leadership, problem solving, and multi-disciplinary thinking were promoted to try to breathe life into a stillborn reform process. But the post-communists knew that to survive they must defeat and discredit such unwelcome intrusions into the Byzantine world of rituals and procedures that continue to animate the Romanian state. Thanks to intimidated or, more usually, compliant judges and civil-servants they would retain control of the laws and regulations and decide how they were to be interpreted. It meant that everything, from deciding whether a new political party could be legalized or a privatization measure could get the go-ahead, was at the discretion of influential networks which co-existed in a baroque form of power sharing, presided over first by Iliescu, and then Adrian Năstase and his successors.

The FSN and each of its successors, the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN), the Party of Romanian Social Democracy (PDSR), and finally the Social Democratic Party have been plagued by splits and infighting without the narrow and unrepresentative form of political rule imposed by Iliescu ever being thrown into question. By 1995–96, even one of Iliescu's closest allies, Virgil Măgureanu, the head of the SRI, was willing to allow the opposition alliance, the Romanian Democratic Convention, to replace the PDSR in office. Hard economic decisions had to be taken due to the profligacy of recent years, which had witnessed the rise of a rent-seeking elite. The arrival of a pro-Western government could restart the foreign loans and aid which had been withheld from the government of Nicolae Văcăroiu due to their misuse. The risk of an economic and financial collapse, along the lines that occurred in Bulgaria in the mid-1990s

¹⁹ "Cum a infectat rețeaua Voicu România," *Evenimentul Zilei* (20 March 2010).

due to similar abuses at the top, could be reduced. It might even be a delicious bonus if pragmatic elements in the opposition put aside their ideas for cleaning up politics and forcing the rest of the political class to adhere to the rule of law.

It is clear that little could stop the institutionalisation of the political system masterminded by the PDSR, if important opposition elements began to adhere to its rulebook for governance. This process of normalisation, in which the sharp ideological dividing lines of the early- to mid-1990s began to recede, indeed occurred during the presidency of Emil Constantinescu from 1996 to 2000. This academic and prominent figure from the civic world always retreated from challenging hidden power structures in the economy and the secret services.²⁰ Instead, he presided over a series of governments in which ministers and their parliamentary backers became increasingly comfortable with deriving benefits from holding office. Gradually, the idea that politics essentially revolved around transferring state assets into private hands and building up a network of patron-client relations to ensure this process operated smoothly, began to extend beyond the PSD. How much this drab vision of politics animated the PSD's opponents would be made clear after 2004 under Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, the leader of the Liberals and Prime Minister of a heterogeneous coalition government. A conflict with the President, Traian Băsescu, which included personal and political dimensions, revolved around whether the Iliescu formula for ensuring that politics consisted of satisfying the appetites of a wide range of privileged interests should be replaced by a more citizen-orientated model, focussing on institutional reform and the accountability of elected members of the elite to the law.

The PSD's intervention on the side of Tăriceanu and his allies, who were known as "the petro liberals" on account of the role played by their leading member, Dinu Patriciu, in the energy sector, resulted in a provisional victory for them.²¹ It was one of the PSD's greatest accomplishments to persuade other political forces to treat the state

²⁰ Emil Constantinescu, *Timpul dărmării, timpul zidirii*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Universalia, 2002). This is a memoir of his time as President.

²¹ See Tom Gallagher, *Romania and the European Union: How the Weak Conquered the Strong* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 186–87, 191.

and its institutions as their own personal property and the laws as something that applied mainly to simple folk. Adrian Năstase, Prime Minister from 2000 to 2004, had allowed opposition figures prepared to abide by the PSD's rules to play a prominent role in a privatisation process, parts of which occurred under informal criteria. He was less ideologically hidebound than Iliescu, and more convinced that the privatisation and deregulation measures that had begun when his party spent four years in opposition could in fact stabilise a political system meant to benefit the privileged. Figures who had risen to prominence in the 1990s, not so much through exploiting previous connections inside the system but through economic prowess and ruthlessness (Sorin Ovidiu Vântu as well as Patriciu immediately spring to mind), joined an oligarchy mainly composed of second echelon communists or members of the communist youth movement, as well as those elements of the secret police who had exercised control over foreign trade in communist times.

A more broadly-based economic oligarchy with ties not just to the dominant political force increased the likelihood that the process of converting political advantages into sweeping economic ones would not face a decisive challenge. The success of extending the range of privileges beyond the PSD and its clients was shown in 2007, when the Hungarian minority party, the UDMR, joined with the PSD, the PNL and Dan Voiculescu's Conservatives in trying to remove Băsescu from office, a move that was foiled when he was re-installed by the popular vote in a referendum. Just as shrill anti-communism turned out to be a rhetorical screen for the historic parties, the PNL and the National Peasants (both heavily infiltrated by the secret services from 1990 onwards), so was territorial autonomy an empty threat from the leaders of the UDMR. They were preoccupied by material concerns, and fortunes were made by several of their veteran parliamentarians based on favorable transactions with the state.²² The ability of public money to constantly reinforce the private wealth of many of those at the centre of public life proved the crucial stabilizing element that seemed to be missing in Romanian politics for nearly a decade after the bloody overthrow of Ceaușescu. Advocates of democracy from

²² Gallagher, *Romania and the European Union*, 45.

outside Romania had hoped that the post-communist system would acquire legitimacy by acquiring rules and institutions that were broadly respected by political forces. If these democratic structures proved capable of launching a process of reform, then the integration of citizens into political life and the consolidation of a pluralist system were likely and desirable outcomes. But instead, it was the distribution of state assets among political players, their key economic allies and a retinue of clients, which promoted consensual behavior among warring elite forces. A gulf simultaneously opened up between the state and the millions in society who failed to benefit from political and economic cronyism. But, as in Ceaușescu's time, there was a conviction among power holders that the alienation of the "losers" could be contained by manipulating society.

The media was used to trivialize debate and focus on non-issues even when important decisions were being made about the future direction of the country. During first the Năstase government and then the PNL-dominated one, important parts of the electronic media saw the need to generate massive apathy about politics. Power struggles were portrayed in soap opera terms; merely rival egos were involved. It was assumed there were no fundamental ethical or policy issues at stake. A particular aim was to strengthen the passive features in society so as to ensure the time would never arise when there would be any serious challenge to the grip of those power holders whose rise started after 1989. Some of the big local winners in the messy scramble to transfer state wealth into private holdings had invested a lot of their gains in media operations, and Voiculescu's "Intact" group was joined by other sizeable media holdings in 2007.

The emigration of one-tenth of the adult labor force to work mainly in different parts of the EU also proved an important safety valve that prevented any backlash against official misconduct. In most parts of the country, due to the collusion of much of the political elite in exploiting the state for group and individual ends, no improvement in political standards occurred except in isolated places like the city of Cluj following the electoral defeat of the ultra-nationalist mayor Gheorghe Funar in 2004. Instead, in many places, there was no pretense about who exercised power and for what ends. In districts and towns particularly in the south and the east, families or other kinds of tight-knit alliances enjoy a stranglehold over local decision-making.

They often had members or well-wishers in strategic positions in the town hall, the police, the notary office and, of course, the court house.²³

The post-communist elite's primary source of influence and control arguably lay in the justice system. It continued to be a tool in the hands of the powerful, ready to be used against rivals or indeed ordinary citizens who got in their way. The executive enjoyed important leverage over the different levels of the judicial system beyond 2000, so it is impossible to speak of any effective separation of powers being in place. From 2005, a Supreme Council of Magistrates (CSM) was supposed to be in place to regulate the justice system. It was meant to ensure its independence, build up professional standards, punish abuses and, overall, ensure that the justice system served the wider public good rather than an exclusive set of interests. However, its composition has been controlled by senior officials with no vested interest in breaking with past arrangements. One well-known journalist observed in 2004: "All the important hierarchies in the justice system are filled with the wives, in-laws, cousins, nephews ... of the politico-financial clans, representing the ruling party."²⁴

It is perhaps hardly surprising that nearly all cases of corruption involving senior figures in public life and even middle-ranking civilian and military officials end in acquittal or light sentences, that is, if they reach a full trial, since many lapse due to judges accepting the pleas of defense lawyers for a postponement of the case. The Supreme Council of Magistrates is supposed to manage the justice system in the public interest, but it has turned into a staff association prepared to use aggressive methods to defend the privileges of its senior members, even backing a judicial strike which brought the justice system to a standstill in the autumn of 2009. Instead of a transparent and efficient justice system taking the lead to remove some of the worst abuses in public life, its management is controlled by judges and magistrates who share the desire of much of the political class to enjoy extravagant privileges without contributing anything in return to the public interest.²⁵

²³ See Gallagher, *Theft of a Nation*, 313–14.

²⁴ Cornel Nistorescu, *Evenimentul Zilei* (20 February 2004).

²⁵ Several devastating reports about the completely unreformed nature of the justice system were leaked from within the EU in 2008–09. See *Draft Report*

Romania's various elites have been single-minded in adapting change to suit their private political and economic interests. But under the surface, important changes have occurred in the composition of the post-communist oligarchy. Until the late 1990s, political power used to be exercised by the managers of state enterprises, not a few of whom had been involved in the asset stripping of their firms. Plenty launched themselves as nascent capitalists by nationalizing losses and privatizing profits, knowing that retribution in a court of law was highly unlikely. They faded from the scene after the privatization or closure of much of the heavy industry occurred after 2000. Instead, the centre of political gravity shifted from Bucharest to the regions, thanks to the decision of the European Union to impose regional structures on the country for the delivery of funding meant to modernize Romania's infrastructure before it became a full member. Enterprising local politicians soon discovered that this cash was capable of being intercepted if sufficient ingenuity or brazenness was displayed. EU officials had difficulty in tracing the fate of the huge sums involved. If they did discover wrongdoings, the authorities whom they assumed were their partners in preparing Romania for entry to the world's most prestigious regional economic and political entity deployed various stratagems to avoid taking action. Regional groupings soon became the dominant element in the PSD. They were usually commanded by a "baron," heavily involved in local business, who was mayor of a city or president of the county council. The strength of the "baronocracy" was shown when its members united (for tactical reasons) to thwart Iliescu when he attempted to return as head of the PSD in 2005. The regionalization strategy of the EU failed to produce the infrastructural transformation needed if Romania was to handle the challenges of entry (particularly competition from existing member states).²⁶ Instead, a strong case

of an Advisory Visit under chapter 24 in the fields of Justice and Home affairs in Romania, 29 March-2 April 2004, European Commission (Brussels, April 2004); see also W. de Pauw, *Expert Report on the Fight Against Corruption/ Cooperation and Verification Mechanism* (Bucharest, 12-15 November 2007) (published on the website of *The Economist*, 3 July 2008, www.economist.com).

²⁶ See Tom Gallagher, "External Assistance for Political Contenders in Transition States: Cautionary Tales from the Balkans," in Peter Burnell, ed., *Globalizing Democracy: Political Parties and Party Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006), 104-121

can be made that the EU's shortsightedness stimulated corruption, strengthened the oligarchical nature of the PSD, and drained competitive democracy of much of its content in many parts of the country. An archipelago of political power adamantly opposed to being made accountable to democratic rules tightened its grip. With regional and city political bosses aligning with top businessmen, the local arena ceased to be one where any hopes of political renewal remained, certainly over much of the south and east of the country.

The Mirage of Europeanization

Entry into the European Union on the restricted agenda of the domestic power networks was perhaps the greatest triumph of the elite, which had regrouped and mutated from the old structures, acquiring new adherents from those prepared to build a venal and unrepresentative system of power relations in Romania.²⁷ Supposedly a peripheral and even backward country, Romania was being transformed as the EU gradually projected its values and norms eastwards after 2000. The exercise of "soft power" has been theorized as a process of Europeanization at work. But the EU's engagement with Romania turned out to be low-grade and uninspired. Serious design flaws have been exposed in the EU's efforts to establish an arena coinciding with the recognized borders of Europe, where values of economic and political pluralism would be dominant. Instead, new forms of political authoritarianism, combined with manipulation of the media and the advancing of criminality deep into the heart of the economy, have occurred. The EU's humanizing and moral vision, in which an ex-communist state like Romania saw the rise of an engaged citizenry emboldened by the reform of public institutions, lies in tatters.

It is hard to see how any other outcome was possible, because the EU ended up negotiating with the successors of the communist *nomenklatura* and secret police. Herta Müller, the German writer who

²⁷ This part of the chapter is mainly derived from my book, *Romania and the European Union: How the Weak Vanquished the Strong* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

in September 2009 won the Nobel Prize in Literature for her fictional writings about life under the Ceaușescu dictatorship, has frequently commented upon the continuing influence of old structures which mutated in order to master new challenges.²⁸ So have a tiny handful of alert EU officials who discovered that they were negotiating with the wrong people and that the real levers of power were being pulled by people who usually kept themselves well hidden from view.

Romania possessed medium-rank officials, fluent in foreign languages and capable of dissimulation, who had won concessions for the Ceaușescu regime before 1980 despite its primitive character. Some of them were re-activated after 1989 and new ones were trained who functioned effectively in the diplomatic service, business, and even the world of civil society, extracting concessions for Romania from the European Union by making bogus promises of reform.

Romanians found themselves increasingly spectators after 2000, with no way of influencing the fast pace of change which brought about high economic growth rates, the rise of spectacular personal fortunes, and striking inequalities between the political class and the rest of society. This occurred thanks to economic liberalization sponsored by the European Union. A lean competitive economy was required in order to attract investment and hopefully enable Romania one day to be a viable member of the EU. So was a faster pace of political liberalization and institutional reform, things given equivalent weight in the EU's blueprint for eastern enlargement. But during the seven years of negotiations, it was economic conditions, not political ones, which Brussels was most interested in making Bucharest comply with.

The EU forgot that the post-communist ruling elite had already been busy for years transferring state assets into private hands in numerous ways. So it was hardly likely to object to a further contraction of the state and the consolidation of a tight-knit capitalist class based on familiar power groups, some with a pre-1989 lineage, others more recent. The masterstroke employed by the Bucharest oligarchy was to induce major multi-national firms to become advocates of

²⁸ Herta Müller, "Securitate in all but name," *Sight and Sound* (31 August 2009), www.sightandsound.com/features/1910.html.

early membership on informal terms. Juicy contracts were offered by the Năstase government to top firms which, in an era of declining party memberships, are a major source of funding for the chief West European parties. These companies lobbied the major German and French parties for early membership with the promise of reforms to be delivered at some unspecified point later on.²⁹

There was no shortage of pro-European elements in Romanian society, with skills and commitments that could have improved the quality of the accession process. But the EU froze out the reform-minded constituency. Ordinary citizens bore the overwhelming burden of a poorly-planned accession process. A huge exodus of people (as much as 10 percent of the labor force) occurred, which badly distorted the job-market and means it is difficult to find the state funding necessary to support an ageing population.

The national elite had an excellent role-playing strategy. It went through the motions of change: ministries were constantly restructured, action plans and targets for reform were launched and re-launched. This enabled EU officials to say in their reports that change indeed was coming. Top figures in Bucharest noticed that when the deadlines for implementing targets drew near, the EU was prepared to relax its conditions. The Commission feared declaring failure (and admitting that it had messed up) because it would only have drawn attention to its own lack of professionalism.³⁰

Thus, ever since the Kosovo crisis of 1999, when the EU decided that Romania could start negotiations despite being palpably unfit to meet the economic entry terms, informal criteria determined Romania's progress each step of the way. The EU turned out to be clueless about what it wanted from Romania beyond the purely formalistic requirements of membership. But, arguably, the domestic elite had its own very coherent vision: opportunities for the entrenchment of their networks of wealth and power at the heart of the world's most successful regional political and economic entity.

²⁹ See Gallagher, *Romania and the European Union*, 159–61, 188–89.

³⁰ See Gallagher, *Romania and the European Union*, 111.

Conclusion

The main political cleavage is now between those determined to shape the country around rules and values which benefit a restricted set of players and those still committed to the arduous task of building institutions and establishing norms which make the state legitimate in the eyes of the vast majority of its citizens. The initiative now lies with those lacking any wider obligations beyond their own enrichment and domination more than at any time since 1990. The party that was revamped in order to rule in non-totalitarian conditions has managed to win over most of the other parties to both its values and strategy for conserving power. It also benefits from the demobilization of those citizens willing, through the 1990s, to plunge into the political fray in order to try and achieve a decisive break with the past. After a brief rally in 2004, they have subsided into inactivity and even despair. The failure of the EU to act as a decisive lever for change, disappointment with the performance of Traian Băsescu as President, and a whole set of changes, particularly in the cultural and media worlds, have encouraged people to retreat from political commitments. So, an unprincipled system, initially built on terror and hypocrisy and later corruption, has proven more resilient in Romania than perhaps anywhere else in Eastern Europe.

Today, the population is in a psychologically diminished state, fragmented, distrustful, and unable to articulate or agree on a set of public values that will enable it to shape even a small part of the national destiny. The citizenry is prostrate because its rulers have discovered how to exploit their collective weaknesses. In a land where psychologists and sociologists were virtually outlawed in the 1970s, the rulers use an army of employees from these branches of the social sciences, as well as media and management studies, to devise ever more effective ways of keeping Romanians sedated and therefore incapable of altering their social situation for the better. It is hard to see any quick prospect of Romania moving in a genuine direction of European-inspired reform; instead, it is a form of pseudo-Europeanization drawing on some of the worst elements of Balkan political culture that shows every sign of prevailing.

Postscript

In the presidential election campaign of November 2009, Traian Băsescu (following a period of drift since the 2007 referendum) revived the image of the “outsider,” which had been so advantageous for him in 2004. Up against Mircea Geoană, a lacklustre PSD challenger in the deciding round on 6 December, it made the difference between victory and defeat. The President as “outsider,” battling a formidable array of economic, political and media forces, proved an appealing image to voters who were alienated from the entire political class into which Băsescu had been placed after 2004 by disillusioned supporters. He has stated that his objective continues to be that of making a chronically under-performing state work more effectively and not just in the interests of the privileged few. But it remains to be seen if, like Mao Tse-tung, he is using the language of the popular forum to disguise the politics of the palace.

Certainly this was the impression given when news broke of the composition of the post-electoral government on 22 December 2009. Dan Tapalagă, a tenacious opponent of oligarchical politics, feared that “Prime Minister Emil Boc has sacrificed all expectations of reform, cynically rewarding instead a political clientele.”³¹ Time will therefore show whether the bruising and often dramatic electoral contest of 2009 had merely been a political struggle between organized factions whose visions of how to conduct politics in Romania do not fundamentally differ.

An important breakthrough may have occurred with the detention, on 30 March 2010, of the PSD Senator Cătălin Voicu, after he had been accused of having used his influence over magistrates and police to shield businessmen and politicians from prosecution. The Senate and a top branch of the justice system approved the request from the National Anti-Corruption Department (DNA), set up in 2005 to combat high-level corruption.³² Previously, its work had regularly been frustrated by parliament and top echelons of the justice system.

³¹ Dan Tapalaga, “Inapoi la nomenclatura,” *Hotnews* (20 December 2009).

³² See the Romanian press during the last ten days of March 2010. English languages summaries of the events discussed here are provided by *Nine O'clock* (www.nineoclock.ro) and *Adevarul* (www.adevarul.ro).

Numerous cases had been thrown out by unsympathetic or poorly-qualified judges on technicalities or else had been endlessly postponed. Extremely light sentences were usually handed down where guilt had been established.

The arrest of such an influential politician is only likely to prove a major turning-point if the political will emerges, particularly from the ruling Democratic Liberals(PD-L),to make modernisation and reform of the justice system a key priority for the future. If Bănescu wishes to narrow the stark gulf between society and the interlocking political and economic groups of the oligarchy, his own party needs to become a trusted ally. It is the only party that contains an active reformist current making plans for institutional reform. But one of its chief members, the Euro deputy Cristian Preda, remarked early in 2010 that “I am sorry to say that Romanian society is in a much better state than is the PD-L or any other party.”³³ Currently, its narrow parliamentary majority has been reinforced by a stream of defections mainly from the PSD. They have set up a National Union of Progress of Romania (UNPR), whose aim appears to be to represent the state structures and powerful economic forces in politics. Thus, the tendency for sections of the bureaucracy and resourceful capitalists to use the state as their private property is likely to be reinforced. Even if the PSD, whose founder Ion Iliescu is the architect of this spoils system, becomes a shadow of its former self, then an exploitative set of relationships are likely to remain at the heart of Romanian politics.

The country has known two lost decades since 1989, when pale images of economic and political pluralism have been created and the state has remained substantially unreformed and still shaped around clientelistic interests. Prospects of creating a democracy where politicians are accountable to the citizens who elected them appear only a little brighter as Romania embarks on its third “post-revolutionary” decade. A huge effort will be required from many citizens in a demoralised society (where only a meagre 38 percent bothered to vote in the last parliamentary elections) for any significant progress to be made.

³³ *Revista 22* (Bucharest, 2–8 March 2010).

PETER VOITSEKHOVSKY

*In the Footsteps of 1989:
Ukraine's Orange Revolution as a
Carnival of Anti-politics*

“Whereas we defeated a communist regime, you have defeated a post-communist regime and thus have started a new page in the global democratization.”

*Václav Havel addressing Viktor Yushchenko
in Washington, D.C. on April 6, 2005*

There was a flavor of carnival in the atmosphere of the joint session of the U.S. Congress on April 6, 2005. Vice President Dick Cheney presided wearing an orange tie, while some of the congressmen came with orange scarves on their shoulders or orange bows pinned to their lapels. On that day, Victor Yushchenko, Ukraine's new President, was the guest of honor on Capitol Hill. Members of Congress gave a standing ovation to their foreign invitee; with much enthusiasm, they waved the orange scarves, kerchiefs and ribbons—just like the crowds of Ukrainians did in the famous scenes that had been televised from Kiev's central square. The enthusiastic legislators seemed eager to partake in Yushchenko's fascinating victory that had turned him into a world icon.¹

The imagery of Ukraine's Orange Revolution—eighteen days of peaceful and spirited mass protests on cold and snowy streets, in standoff with riot police squads—fascinated millions of people around the world and “irresistibly reminded” them of the revolutions of 1989.²

¹ *Time Magazine* listed Viktor Yushchenko among the “heroes and icons of the year” on April 18, 2005.

² Timothy Garton Ash and Timothy Snyder, “The Orange Revolution,” *The New York Review of Books* vol. 52, no. 7 (April 28, 2005).

Some went even further suggesting that the Orange Revolution was “a classical liberal revolution, like 1848.”³

Several years later, there is much less certainty and more controversy about the meaning of these events. Were they truly a “people’s revolution” or rather a “revolutionary coup”?⁴ Or were they, perhaps, a “revolt of millionaires against billionaires,” with an element of conspiracy?⁵ And how accurate or analytically meaningful is it to categorize these events in the group of “colored revolutions”⁶ or “electoral revolutions”⁷—in implicit contrast to the revolutions of 1989?

The label “colored revolutions” was coined by Russian adversaries of the revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. It was intended as a derogatory nickname and initially employed the adjective “flower” (цветочные), which was later replaced by “colored” or “color” (цветные).⁸ The substitution was apparently made because the mocking connotation of “цветочные” disappears in the English translation. Today,

³ Anders Åslund, “What I Saw at the Orange Revolution,” *The Weekly Standard* vol. 10, no. 15 (December 27, 2004).

⁴ “The Orange Revolution: ‘People’s Revolution’ or Revolutionary Coup?,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* vol. 10 (November 2008): 525–549.

⁵ This label was widely used in Russian-language media starting from late November 2004. Its coinage is attributed to Dmitry Vydrin (in an interview with Ukrainian Public Radio, transcript posted on *Ukrainska Pravda* (December 31, 2004). URL: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2004/12/31/3005907/>).

⁶ See for instance: Joshua A. Tucker, “Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions,” *Perspectives on Politics* vol. 5, no. 3 (September 2007): 535–51.

⁷ Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Volchik, “Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions,” *Journal of Democracy* vol. 17, no. 4 (2006): 5–18.

⁸ One of the earliest uses of “цветочные революции” (“flower revolutions”) was in a news report on *vesti.ru* dated November 24, 2004—the third day of the Kiev protests—entitled “Flower Revolutions. Scenario Unchanged” that was saying, in part (translated from Russian): “Everything looks very similar [to the events in Georgia], even in details ... Russian specialists who professionally investigated this matter claim that dozens of millions of U.S. dollars from various overseas organizations have recently been delivered to Ukraine ... In the U.S. and Europe there are forces that would like to turn Ukraine into a front-line state, a bridgehead for making pressure on us.” Available at <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=106711&tid=25004>.

a suggested Russian-language definition of “colored revolutions” is as follows: “Mass street disturbances and protests, typically resulting in a political regime change ... without military involvement.”⁹ This definition is politicized in the manner of “reactionary rhetoric”¹⁰ and thus compromises the term itself.

In English-language academic writing, the term “colored revolutions” is used interchangeably with “electoral revolutions.” The latter is understood as democratizing elections with a “mass surge of participation in the streets before and sometimes after the elections.”¹¹ Originally, however, the term “electoral revolution” denoted a peaceful electoral victory of a reformist anti-establishment challenger¹²—such as the victory of Emil Constantinescu in Romania in 1996 or Vicente Fox in Mexico in 2000.

When applied to Ukraine’s Orange Revolution or to similar events in Tbilisi and Belgrade, the label “electoral revolution” indicates an obvious contrast to the revolutions of 1989: in Kiev, Tbilisi and Belgrade, an election was a catalyst for mass mobilization, whereas in Prague and Berlin, mass mobilization and protests came first, free elections followed. “Electoral revolutions” are viewed as only distant relatives of the revolutions of 1989 because: (a) they are thought to be about electoral fraud rather than regime change; (b) their post-communist environment is believed to be less oppressive than the totalitarian communist system; and (c) they are thought to be based on preparation and coordination rather than spontaneity.¹³

This paper will look into the story of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution to demonstrate that the above-listed assumptions are inaccurate, and

⁹ See http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Цветные_революции.

¹⁰ In parallel with the “reactionary rhetoric” targeted against the revolutions of 1989, as discussed here: Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Reassessing the Revolutions of 1989,” in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Democracy After Communism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 116.

¹¹ Valery J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, 5.

¹² Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Electoral Revolutions,” *Society* vol. 35, no. 10 (1997): 61–65.

¹³ Klara Sogindolska, “Comparative Review of the 1989 Democratic Revolutions and the New Electoral Revolutions in the Post-Communist Space,” *MPSA Conference Paper*, 2007.

that there are remarkable parallels between the revolutions of 1989 and the Orange Revolution in terms of their motives, the features of respective *ancien regimes*, and the spontaneity of mass mobilization. One important difference, however, can be found precisely there where these revolutions seem to be most similar: in the role of their “carnival” components.

The Greengrocer’s Redemption

A presidential election became the spark that ignited the events of the revolution. But the label “electoral” emphasizes the procedural side, thus overlooking something important—those aspects of the revolution that fascinated millions of onlookers around the world, including the members of U.S. Congress who greeted Viktor Yushchenko a few months later. In those December days of 2004, many people were asking whether this was really a conflict about an election. A foreign journalist’s comment conveys this point:

You begin to feel that there is something you don’t understand in their affairs, that you don’t know their undercurrents. Both sides are convinced that they are choosing not the President, but the fate of their country for decades ahead. ... Otherwise, it is difficult to explain their sitting on the streets under snow, and the declarations, first by the western, then by the eastern provinces, of the intent to secede.¹⁴

The assumption that protesters were mobilized because of indignation about a falsified vote count (election fraud) is not fully accurate: it implies that there had been an electoral race of equal contenders. Indeed, formally there were two main contenders: Viktor Yushchenko, running as an independent candidate, and Viktor Yanukovych, a candidate for the Party of Regions. In reality, however, Yushchenko’s opponent was not Yanukovych or his party; it was the “machine of the

¹⁴ From the commentary by Lev Koshcheev, an editor from Yekaterinburg, dated December 7, 2004. URL: <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2004/12/7/188276.html>.

state,” with its arsenal of intimidation techniques and hurdle making, commonly and euphemistically referred to as “the administrative resource.” As a strategist of Yushchenko’s campaign office explained it to a foreign journalist:

We were confronted with the fact that we had to wage a war with the machine of the state. Nobody was ever able to win against the state. [...] This was the political essence of the situation. The whole machine of the state opposed us, with all its components. Not just some public organizations or parties. No matter whose name was there—Yanukovych or anyone else [of those around President Kuchma]—particular names were secondary. So Yushchenko was saying this many times: the name does not matter; our opponent is *zlochynna vlada* [“the criminal authority”].¹⁵

Thus, Yushchenko’s campaign re-enacted Václav Havel’s famous definition of the struggle that led to the revolutions of 1989: “Citizens against the state.” But how different was the state ruled by President Kuchma from the state as it was under communism? It was no longer totalitarian; yet Havel himself referred to the Orange Revolution as “the second act of squaring with the totalitarian regime.”¹⁶

In communist states, George Orwell was banned; yet in Poland, his writings were published and distributed by NOWA, the underground publishing house of the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR). George Orwell’s writings were a powerful resource for exposing the lies of communist regimes. In Kuchma’s Ukraine, they were no longer banned, but their inspirational power remained just as strong. An activist of Pora, the student organization that catalyzed the Orange Revolution protests, recalls: “In early 2004, I and my like-minded friends were driven by personal hatred for the Kuchma regime. We

¹⁵ Interview with Aleksandr Malikov recorded on January 26, 2005. From the archives of Steven York, the author and producer of the *Orange Revolution* documentary (*A Force More Powerful Films*, 2007).

¹⁶ Václav Havel’s address to Viktor Yushchenko at the Senate Library in Washington, D.C. on April 7, 2005. Quoted from Radio Liberty report, URL: <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/929107.html>.

were reading Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, thinking about Ukraine, and we wanted a revolution."¹⁷

Kuchma's regime inherited many features of the late Soviet system. One of them was covert repressiveness. Under Stalin, opponents of the regime had been openly arrested and executed. Under Brezhnev, they were frequently placed in psychiatric asylums or sent into forced exile. Under Kuchma, repression was even more covert, but no less formidable, as shown by the tragic case of Georgiy Gongadze—a vocal critic of Kuchma who was kidnapped and secretly murdered by a group of police officers acting on orders that originated from the President's office.

A perfect example of the duplicity of Kuchma's regime were the *temnyky*—confidential instructions circulated among editors of the leading media outlets informing them how to cover current events, and which to ignore. Those memos were formulated in impersonal statements and sent to editorial fax machines, unsigned. Their form epitomized the Soviet double-mindedness; they were intended for the professionals of “reading between the lines.” The phrase “In the opinion of analysts” meant “You must present this as your point of view”; “The event is important and topical” meant “Give it favorable coverage”; “There is no comment on this event” stood for “Do not even mention that it took place.”¹⁸ This was truly Orwellian centrally-controlled self-censorship. Journalists and editors complied, fearing intimidations or even their safety.

Just like in Soviet times, factory and office employees were forced to attend political rallies to express support for the regime. This was described as follows:

Compulsory rallies take place not only during working hours, but even after a working day. Those who avoid attending them are subjected to various pressures. In Soviet times, collective admiration and fear of the authority were cultivated in accordance with the party and government resolutions. Today, Ukraine's

¹⁷ Oleksiy Tolkachov, “The Unknown Stories of the Maidan,” (in Ukrainian) *Ukrainska Pravda* (November 20, 2009).

¹⁸ Examples of the *temnyky* from 2001–2004 were published by *Ukrainska Pravda* on March 7, 2007.

President Leonid Kuchma and his entourage act with the same methods. And the ordinary people have not changed much, either. They grumble in discontent, but sheepishly allow themselves to be pulled by the rope to a butcher. The administrative resource skillfully uses fear and moral weakness of the petty person.¹⁹

Kuchma's Ukraine was a society of Havelian "greengrocers"—ordinary people with habitual compliance to the regime and its rules of the game. Since Soviet times, the rules of the game continued to emphasize duplicity, doublethink, and subconsciously accepted disparity between official law and informal "norms of behavior." A new feature of this was an increased scope of bribery and other corrupt practices. Honest journalists spoke in despair about a "suffocating" political atmosphere in the country.²⁰

The call to "live with the truth" was gaining strength in Ukraine years before the Orange Revolution. A predecessor of the famous Pora was the student movement "Za Pravdu!" ("For Truth!"). It was launched in January 2001, in the midst of the loud "tape scandal" (a.k.a. the Kuchmagate)—when recordings of Kuchma's conversations allegedly made by his bodyguard became public and implicated the President in ordering, among his other dark business, the murder of Georgiy Gongadze. The students demanded truth to be told in the Gongadze affair, but their motto had a wider meaning as well—a demand of truth as the moral standard for Ukraine's politics and society.

Three years later, this theme was powerfully developed in the Pora campaign materials. The ideas and practices of the Pora campaign of the spring and summer of 2004 are reminiscent of the principles of "anti-politics" as moral opposition to the regime,²¹ and the efforts to educate the "greengrocers" that were made by KOR, Charter 77, and other civil society organizations that had prepared the revolutions of 1989. Likewise, Pora's mission was to motivate society towards a rev-

¹⁹ URL: <http://korrespondent.net/worldabus/98528>.

²⁰ Yulia Mostovaia, "Suffocating" (Russian: "Нечем Дышать") *Zerkalo Nedeli* (December 20, 2003).

²¹ György Konrád, "Antipolitics," in Gale Stokes, ed., *From Stalinism to Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 175–80.

olution and “to actualize the public demand for change.”²² But they did not intend to lead crowds in a revolution, nor make a “revolution plan” for election day. In fact, Pora never campaigned for Yushchenko as their candidate. They produced and disseminated a series of flyers exposing “Kuchmizm” as a system synonymous with “unemployment, criminality, poverty, corruption, and hopelessness.”²³ They also conducted street performances and interactive events, much in the style of the Orange Alternative in Poland.

A flyer produced by Pora employs the theme of the then fashionable blockbuster *The Matrix*: a picture of two open palms, a pill in each—one for choosing “the old life” of simulated reality, and the other for a road to the truth. That other pill bears the Pora logo. The opposite page of the flyer shows a computer screen with the text: “File #1. Today’s Ukraine is the MATRIX where everything is fake: power, laws, independence, presidents, elections, wages, learning, grades, rights and liberties, even life itself. Stop fooling yourself. It’s time to live a real life. It’s time to choose.”

While public attitudes to the election and the demand for change were shaped by a multitude of factors, Pora’s slogans definitely helped to frame street protesters’ messages. Neither Pora, nor Yushchenko’s campaign headquarters expected the massive turnout on the first day of protests on Kiev’s central square. There are indications that not only the authorities, but the opposition leaders as well were “genuinely surprised by the scale, persistence, and devotion of the crowds.”²⁴ The total number of people who came out on the streets to take part in rallies and protests is estimated at roughly 5.5 million, or close to 15 percent of the country’s adult population.²⁵ This was a moment of redemption for Ukraine’s “greengrocer society.” “I call it a revolution of dignity, because the most important matter for the people taking part in it was to uphold their dignity,” commented Aleksander Kwasniewski, the President of Poland, who mediated the round table

²² Oleksiy Tolkachov, *ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Georgiy Kasianov, “Orange Revolution: Several Observations about the Nature of Things,” *The Action Ukraine Report* no. 660 (February 15, 2006).

²⁵ Estimate made by Irina Bekeshkina, *Ukrainska Pravda* (November 22, 2009).

talks in Kiev during the critical days of November and December 2004.²⁶ In this sense, the Orange Revolution is very closely related to the revolutions of 1989, with their pathos of “the triumph of civic dignity and political morality over ideological monism, bureaucratic cynicism and police dictatorship.”²⁷

Yushchenko voters were not driven by a single coherent ideology.²⁸ What united them was the rejection of the Kuchmist system and a hope to have its wrongs corrected. This is why the following characterization of the Orange Revolution—given by Zbigniew Brzezinski—appears to be the most insightful:

The Orange Revolution was a revolution of hope, of genuine hope, and, in many respects, also abstract hope. ... It was in a sense a moment in which a transcendent shared sense of national identity defined in democratic content became a common property of the Ukrainian people. It was a mood, it was a faith, it was an aspiration, it was a desire and it was also very much a determination. ... In many respects ephemeral and yet vital, it is something that has to be honored, treasured, and respected.²⁹

How Orange Trumped Chestnut

In categorizing the Orange Revolution as “electoral,” what is implied is that this was a prepared event with little, if any, spontaneity—in contrast to the revolutions of 1989. Spontaneity, however, is an intrinsic feature of any genuine revolution. Thus, the qualifying adjective “elec-

²⁶ Interview with the *Zerkalo Nedeli* (March 26, 2005).

²⁷ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Revolutions of 1989* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

²⁸ Mikhail Dubiniansky discusses the constituency of Yushchenko voters as a situational alliance of groups holding largely incompatible views: from liberals and modernizers to nationalists and egalitarianists. Mikhail Dubiniansky, “The Orange Mobilization” (in Russian) *Ukrainska Pravda* (January 12, 2010).

²⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, speech delivered at the roundtable “Ukraine’s Transition to an Established National Identity and the Orange Revolution,” *The Action Ukraine Report* (AUR) no. 575 (October 4, 2005).

toral” supports the claims that this revolution was artificial and manipulative in nature. A slightly more radical version of the same claim is to call these events a conspiracy instigated and funded by Western powers—as Kremlin ideologues like to say.

As a matter of fact, ten months prior to the Orange Revolution, an editorial article in *The Wall Street Journal* speculated about the possibility of a “velvet revolution” in Ukraine—in the aftermath of a bloodless “velvet revolution” in Georgia. The writer remarked that “the opposition in Ukraine should achieve greater success by organizing acts of protest,” whereas the U.S. should give more help to democratic opponents of President Kuchma. The newspaper even proposed a cool brand name for the hypothetical revolution—a “chestnut revolution” (after the tree that is considered a symbol of Kiev).³⁰ Until late October 2004, the predicted revolution was discussed back and forth very actively, and the proposed name—“chestnut”—became customary. Yet, as soon as the hypothetical revolution became real, that name was dropped, and the revolution was baptized “orange.” Why did “orange” trump “chestnut” as the revolutionary symbol? The answer to this question helps to understand the most revolutionary part of the Orange Revolution—its spontaneous component.

The idea to use orange-colored clothing items or ribbons as a sign of civil solidarity and support for the opposition candidate was a genuine grassroots initiative. It was put forward by a thoughtful young Kievan, Yaroslav Vedmid—totally unconnected to the Yushchenko campaign or Pora. Explaining how this idea was born, Yaroslav emphasized that a push was needed to help the people overcome their fear of the authorities: “My friend and I realized that Yushchenko’s campaign strategists did not fully take into account the problem of people’s fear. The pressure and intimidation created an atmosphere of fright; but the campaign leaders did not try to help the people overcome their fear.”³¹

The two friends proposed their solution: a visual sign of people’s solidarity with the opposition and AGAINST the regime. On October 25, 2004 they sent out an e-mail message entitled “The Orange Ribbon Initiative.” It called on Yushchenko sympathizers to wear anything

³⁰ “A Chestnut Revolution,” *The Wall Street Journal* (February 10, 2004).

³¹ Interview with Yaroslav Vedmid, *Ukrainska Pravda* (November 22, 2005).

orange, or simply attach an orange ribbon to their clothes, or a car, or a tree, etc.—to demonstrate how many they were. In part, the message said:

Today the authorities are using every way to intimidate those who are going to vote for Viktor Yushchenko. By taking advantage of their monopolistic access to the media, they are telling us that Yushchenko's supporters are "terrorists," rogue youths or aging nationalists. Let us show them and one another that this is not so! ... Perhaps, some others will stop fearing when they see that there are so many of us, and will realize that THERE IS NO NEED TO FEAR! Others will understand that we are not radicals, but ordinary people, sane and human. Let us do this for the sake of those who are scared, who have lost faith and are ready to accept their servile life. Your orange ribbon can wake up the hearts of many people. We will definitely win!!³²

Within an hour, Yaroslav received his own letter several times chain-forwarded by different people. Later that day, he saw his family members wearing orange ribbons after they had received the letter, too. Yaroslav understood that his idea was a perfect hit. Wearing orange became a way to make a statement of civic dignity and solidarity—"I am a free person, and I do not fear! I am with those who want change!" As a symbol, it was the opposite of "greengrocer" submissive obedience. To properly understand its meaning in the repressive atmosphere of those days, let us note two details. One: at the time, Yaroslav took caution not to disclose his role in the Orange Ribbon initiative even to his own family. Two: at first, Yushchenko's campaign office did not support the initiative. Since the idea had not come from them, they feared it could be "a provocation."³³ But soon the official campaign network joined in and began to promote it with all their resources.

Andriy Bondar, a Ukrainian writer, recalls those days as "an orange epidemic" that was creating an instant sense of solidarity and hearty

³² Published under the title "Orange Revolution (a new initiative)!" on *Maidan* (online public forum) (October 25, 2004). URL: <http://maidan.org.ua/static/mai/1098709243.html>.

³³ Interview with Yaroslav Vedmid, *ibid*.

trust among strangers—a unique and new feeling for many Ukrainians. He believes that “the anthropology of the Orange Revolution” was its biggest accomplishment.³⁴ The Orange Ribbon campaign boosted the spirit of freedom and solidarity during the four weeks preceding the start of the Maidan protests, and this is how the “mystique of the Maidan” was born—long before the protests commenced.

For the superficial observer, the standoff on the Maidan in December 2004 might look like a never-ending rock music concert, with a permanent stage and huge plasma TV screens. But it was not rock music that produced the “Maidan mystique.” In the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, both rivaling political camps have tried to replicate its successful “method” of concert-style rallies on the Maidan.³⁵ The replication never worked. “There was much entourage on the stage; but even the best wig cannot masquerade the absence of real hair,” remarked an observer. “This Maidan was empty and spiritless, like anything that is done for money only.”³⁶

Revolutions as Carnivals

Padraic Kenney explains why the concept of the “carnival” is so suitable for explaining the non-violent revolutions of 1989: a carnival breaks down borders of all kinds, and as such it helped to break down the rules of politics under communist regimes.³⁷ Laughter liberates a scared person by helping him or her to get rid of “the social

³⁴ Andriy Bondar, “Exoneraton of the Revolution,” *Ukrainska Pravda* (January 22, 2010).

³⁵ The so-called “blue-and-white Maidan” took place in April and May 2007, when the Party of Regions brought thousands of its foot soldiers (many of whom were paid regular allowances) to Kiev, where they stayed in tents on the same location as their “orange” predecessors in 2004. This “protest” looked spiritless and artificial, and became a subject of popular sarcasm. In 2008 and 2009, the Yulia Timoshenko bloc used the Maidan several times for its thoroughly prepared but likewise spiritless rallies.

³⁶ Yekaterina Kirichenko, “A Holiday That Failed,” *Korrespondent* no. 41 (October 30, 2009).

³⁷ Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution. Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

mask imposed by the official rules and culture.”³⁸ All this fully applies to the Orange carnival on the Kiev streets in 2004: liberation through laughter (with songs, jokes, and hand-made caricatures of the President); the world turned upside down (people instead of vehicles dominating the streets; a police car on a street intersection playing revolutionary songs via its loudspeaker).

On the other hand, carnival is a game. It can be seen as “a played revolution of pre-class and pre-political social order”; and it is also a safety valve, a peculiar tool of law enforcement—the revolution is phony, enacted, and only perpetuates the status quo.³⁹ The carnival of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution was peaceful, non-violent, and optimistic, but it did not result in any significant institutional changes for the country, unlike in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary. Seven years later, Ukrainians see the same old faces in the political leadership and realize that there is not much difference between them; except that one group is more herbivorous, while the other is carnivorous. But both groups have a great appetite, as Andriy Bondar remarks: “As we were chanting the sweet mantras [of the protest rallies], *they* were looking at our dances thinking, ‘the people are letting off steam.’”⁴⁰

One critical aspect that made the Orange Revolution different from the revolutions of 1989 was the role of critical intellectuals. In 2004, Ukraine had no political leaders of great intellectual and moral authority that had come from outside the old system similar to Walesa, Michnik, or Havel. Viktor Yushchenko became the iconic spiritual leader in 2004 because he was intuitively perceived as different from all the others in government—the only one that seemed honest, moral, hearty, and unselfish. Stellar journalist Yulia Mostovaia spoke of Yushchenko as “the Ukrainian Havel,” adding that the two leaders were as different as their respective societies.⁴¹ Andriy Bondar

³⁸ Alla Boiko, “Bakhtin Forever. Was There A Carnival in Ukraine?” *Zerkalo Nedeli* (July 9, 2005).

³⁹ The two ways of looking at carnivals (the optimistic perspective of Mikhail Bakhtin and the pessimistic perspective of Umberto Eco) are discussed in: Christoph Neidhart, *Russia’s Carnival: the Smells, Sights, and Sounds of Transition* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 3–5.

⁴⁰ Andriy Bondar, “Exoneraton of the Revolution”.

⁴¹ *Zerkalo Nedeli* no. 6 (February 16, 2002).

admits that he was naïve when he wrote, in 2004, that Yushchenko was “a miraculous synthesis of Mahatma Gandhi, Kemal Atatürk, and Václav Havel—only sometimes we wish that components 2 and 3 would balance off component 1.” Years later, like many Ukrainians, Bondar feels that Yushchenko had not truly risen over his past when he became “Kuchma’s chief accountant.”⁴² Ironically, the former icon of the revolution is now seen as the biggest masquerader of the carnival.

Labor Contraction of Rebirth

The revolutions of 1989 were followed by disenchantment during the 1990s. A participant of the Velvet Revolution in Prague recalled two decades later:

We were in a wonderful euphoria when standing with everybody on Václav Square in Prague. We hoped to have a renewal. But very soon, our hopes got ruined—there began pillage and embezzlement, huge government loans were given away and never returned ... It is sad to look at the political stage. What’s going on there has nothing in common with ethics or culture. We are disenchanted ... even though we now have the freedom to speak, to travel, and to do business.⁴³

These words strongly resonate with the disenchantment Ukrainians felt about Victor Yushchenko’s presidency. Some even spoke of “the death of the Orange Revolution” when Viktor Yanukovich was elected as President in 2010.⁴⁴ His presidency has brought a revival of Kuchmizm—with its cynical false claims, high-level corruption, covert censorship, and persecution of political opponents (the latter most

⁴² Andriy Bondar, *ibid.*

⁴³ Irina Shtogrin, “Revolution of ’89: Reflections of a Czech Family 20 Years After,” *Radio Liberty Ukrainian Service* (November 13, 2009). URL: <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/1877759.html>.

⁴⁴ James Marson, “In Ukraine, the Death of the Orange Revolution,” *Time Magazine* (February 3, 2010).

scandalously epitomized in the imprisonment of former presidential candidate Yulia Tymoshenko).

If the revolutions of 1989 can be viewed, in Karol Soltan's terms, as a "rebirth"—a reversal from destruction towards creativity and re-enchantment with modernity—then Ukraine's Orange Revolution can arguably be called "a labor contraction of rebirth." A decisive break with the Soviet past is yet to come. However, the Orange Revolution and its aftermath produced important changes in Ukrainian society. Years of increased freedom—although with a lack of accountable governance—have inoculated the public against the fear and submissiveness of the Kuchma years, and also improved their ability for independent and critical thinking. Thus, despite his efforts to establish a Putin-style dictatorship, President Yanukovich has remained a "naked king" in the eyes of the majority of the nation from his very first day in office; an object of mockery, and no more than a caricature of a Putin-style strongman.

More and more Ukrainians today would disagree that the Orange Revolution was ever dead. They point to its legacies in continuing protest rallies and vigils in front of the Yanukovich government offices.⁴⁵ They no longer speak about frustration and disenchantment. As a former activist of the Orange Revolution remarked:

I was never disenchanted with the Orange Revolution—because I had never been enchanted. My expectations have come true. We are now standing higher in our development. Strange as it may sound, our main accomplishment is the exacerbation of all our political and social ills. Exacerbation is a step to recovery. Freedom of speech has given us the opportunity to speak openly. Open fractures are easier to heal.⁴⁶

This new phase in Ukraine's movement toward democracy signifies an end to the personalistic politics of the early post-Soviet period, and sees a growing demand for political accountability.

⁴⁵ This point is made by Ostap Kryvdyk in *Ukrainska Pravda* (November 22, 2011).

⁴⁶ Dmytro Sinchenko, "I never had illusions," *Ukrainska Pravda* (February 18, 2010).

For a number of years, Ukrainian politics has been largely determined by the struggle within the “iron triangle” of the three top personalities: Yushchenko, Tymoshenko, and Yanukovich. Yushchenko was the first to fall. Yanukovich is quickly following Yushchenko’s path: after less than two years in office, he and his party have lost more than half of the support they used to have—due to the fact that the falsity of their declarations and promises is becoming increasingly apparent. In the meantime, Yulia Tymoshenko and her party seem unwilling to give up their dramatic but meaningless appeals to the “spirit of the Maidan,” with equally insincere populist rhetoric. But they are no longer perceived as a political organization “of the people” or “for the people” (let alone “by the people”). People have become less content to accept any leader that demonstrates a messianic style or rhetoric. As Yuri Lutsenko aptly observed, “It will not do again to deliver a new democratic leader in a Mercedes car to the stage of the Maidan, after people have waited there for hours. The people’s leader will already be there—one that will have stepped out of a protesters’ tent, not out of a political party office.”⁴⁷ New, different national leaders are going to emerge soon, while the heavyweights of the Orange and post-Orange period are doomed to go.

Despite some significant peculiarities, in many ways Ukraine repeats the overall path of the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The revolutions of 1989 became the first step towards reuniting the region with the rest of Europe. Today, Ukraine is moving in their footsteps, while slowly but steadily withdrawing from Russia’s post-Soviet influence and instead choosing accession to Europe as a civilizational choice. Legacies of the Orange Revolution continue to guide this nation in efforts to consolidate a system of government fully based on democracy and the rule of law.

⁴⁷ Yuri Lutsenko, “Letter from Prison No. 12,” *Ukrainska Pravda* (November 22, 2011).

JEFFREY C. ISAAC

Conclusion

Shades of Gray: Revisiting the Meanings of 1989

In 1789, the French Ancien Regime fell, with a resounding crash that echoed throughout the European continent. Immanuel Kant spoke for many “enlightened” thinkers when he observed that: “The revolution of a gifted people which we have seen unfolding in our day may succeed or miscarry ... this revolution, I say, nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators ... a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm.”¹

Almost exactly two hundred years later ramparts again came crashing down, this time in the East of Europe. Symbolized so dramatically by “the fall” of the Berlin Wall, the entire edifice of Communist rule—a truly immense superstructure weighing down upon its people—and with it the “Iron Curtain” dividing Europe from itself, came tumbling down, and democratic oppositions long subjected to persecution and marginality were swept into power.²

It did not take long for a powerful consensus to take shape on behalf of a “post-historical” and avowedly liberal interpretation of these events, most famously articulated by Francis Fukuyama, who proclaimed that we have reached “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”³ But Fukuyama was not alone in his enthusiasm. Marc Plattner, co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*,

¹ Immanuel Kant, *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 148.

² See Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*.

³ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* (Summer 1989), 4. See also his *The End of History and the Last Man* especially 39–51.

seconded him, declaring optimistically that we now find ourselves in “a world with one dominant principle of legitimacy, democracy.”⁴ Many commentators from across the political spectrum followed suit. Even Jurgen Habermas declared that the revolutions of 1989 were “rectifying revolutions” that simply restored Eastern Europe to the “normal” liberal democratic trajectory of political modernity.⁵

Such optimism was soon challenged by many liberal democrats of a more cautious bent. Jean-François Revel warned against “an overhasty assumption that the movement toward democracy represented a sort of reverse millennium, the arrival of the eternal kingdom of history.”⁶ Even more skeptical was the advice of Samuel P. Huntington. “To hope for a benign end to history,” he wrote, “is human. To expect it to happen is unrealistic. To plan on it happening is disastrous.”⁷ Yet even Huntington and Revel seemed to agree that liberal democracy was the principal issue placed on the historical agenda by the “fall of the wall.” They simply, though importantly, endorsed a less idealistic, more realistic set of policies designed to maximize the likelihood of the scenario that Fukuyama only prematurely heralded (Huntington, of course, soon moved toward an even more jaundiced view of a “clash of civilizations.” But even this formulation entailed that Europe had a common and essentially “liberal” destiny, even as it denied that this destiny was universal).⁸

⁴ Marc Plattner, “The Democratic Moment,” in Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

⁵ Jurgen Habermas, “What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left,” *New Left Review* (September-October 1990), 3–22.

⁶ Jean-François Revel, *Democracy against Itself: The Future of the Democratic Impulse* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 14–15.

⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, “No Exit: The Errors of Endism,” *The National Interest* (Fall, 1989), 3–11.

⁸ See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). See also Guiseppe di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), and the essays collected in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

In 1996, I published an essay in the journal *Social Research* entitled “The Meanings of 1989” that began in much the same way as the text above—only the tenses have been changed—and proceeded to call into question the then-emergent liberal consensus.⁹ I argued that it minimized the importance of the most exciting developments of 1989, the non-electoral forms of “anti-political politics” improvised by the Central European democratic oppositions seeking to resist communism and constitute genuine spaces of democratic politics. In seeking to defend the ongoing validity and exemplary character of such an “anti-political politics,” I was merely one voice among many Western political theorists drawn to this politics, who sought to keep alive a sense of historical possibility and in particular to indicate ways that Western liberal democracy—itself beset by a growing sense of “democratic disaffection” and “legitimacy crisis”—had something to learn from the recent experience of Central Europe. My point was *not* to question the importance of instituting the rule of law or representative government, but to insist that both the spirit of revolt and the repertoires of collective action enacted by the anti-communist dissidents were of continuing relevance even under a liberal democratic regime, which would NOT represent an end of history even if it represented a welcome development.

That was then, and this is now.

Only slightly more than twenty years have passed since that *annus mirabilis* of 1989. And yet momentous changes have occurred, actualizing certain possibilities, foreclosing others, and settling what had seemed only a short time ago to be in question. Eastern Europe is now firmly in the fold of the EU and NATO, and most of its political elites—including some of the most celebrated former dissidents—have become bona fide proponents of a “New Europe” in league with the U.S. Thoroughly and rapidly incorporated within the structures global capitalism, most Eastern European nation-states have also experi-

⁹ Jeffrey C. Isaac, “The Meanings of 1989,” *Social Research* vol. 63, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 291–344, reprinted in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989* (London: Routledge, 1999).

enced the consolidation of more or less stable liberal democratic electoral institutions. Things are far from perfect—for liberal democracy is an anti-perfectionist form of politics. And the processes of transition have been far from smooth, as witnessed by the acrimonious politics of lustration in many post-communist societies, and most vividly by the wars of post-Yugoslavian succession—the genocides in Bosnia and Kosovo, the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia, and the protectorates still in force in Bosnia and Kosovo. At the same time, notions of some kind of “third way,” or a new form of transnational democracy from below as envisioned by the Helsinki Citizens Assembly and even rhapsodized by Havel himself, now seem rather quaint. And it is hard to avoid the judgment that the past twenty years of post-communism have witnessed the beneficent and successful transition from communism to liberalism in Europe. Case closed.

In 1996 Adam Michnik, articulating the sensibility of many post-1989 former dissidents, famously declared that “gray is beautiful.” Whereas the twentieth century had been a century of ideological frenzy and political extremism—“whether under black or red banners”—people such as himself, who had been subjected to such frenzy, were now exhausted, and chastened, and no longer excited by the colorations of utopia. Michnik, thus, embraced the blandness of liberal democracy. As he wrote:

Democracy is neither black nor red. Democracy is gray, it is established only with difficulty, and its quality and its flavor can be recognized best when it loses under the pressure of advancing red or black radical ideas. [...] Dictatorships, whether red or black, destroy the human capacity for creation [...] only gray democracy, with its human rights and institutions of civil society, can replace weapons with arguments. [...] That is why we say, gray is beautiful.¹⁰

It is worth underscoring that Michnik was describing a sensibility, but also *prescribing* a stance in a situation that was still somewhat unsettled.

¹⁰ Adam Michnik, “Gray is Beautiful,” in *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 326–27.

Far from declaring the ideological victory of liberal democracy, he was insisting on the importance of liberal democracy as a source of ethical and political *commitment*, indeed as something with enemies and thus in need of defending. Furthermore, the liberal democratic ideals and practices being affirmed were worthy precisely by virtue of their openness: “only democracy—having the capacity to question itself—also has the capacity to correct its own mistakes.” There was nothing complacent about this declaration. To the contrary, it had a certain understandable urgency. At the same time, it was sobering and, quite deliberately, well, drab. Only a few years before the *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman would celebrate the promise of global capitalism, declaring that the world is “flat,” Michnik was prescribing a colorless “gray.” It was almost as if, turning a page from Hannah Arendt’s famous notion of the “banality of evil,” he was insisting on the potential *good of banality*. Banality is, well, *banal*, and it is easy to despair of it. For gray is many things, but beautiful does not seem one of them. Michnik knew this well, which is why his words were so deliberately provocative. At the same time, while “gray” is drab, dismal, and dull, it is also calm and comforting, particularly to the over-stimulated, and it would be a presumptuous intellectual conceit to underestimate the value of such calm for societies who had experienced a “short century” of mass murder, occupation, ideological volatility, and insecurity.

Much that has happened in the past twenty-plus years would seem to bolster Michnik’s embrace of the “beautiful gray” of liberalism. Not simply the “normalization” of formerly Eastern European countries now incorporated within a broader “Europe” of common markets and common constitutional values, but also the rise of ethno-chauvinism and ethnic conflict in many of the former Soviet republics farther east; the rise of Islamist political extremism throughout the Middle East and indeed its transplantation in parts of Western Europe; and the so-called “war on terror” led by the U.S. and its allies, and the measures taken in prosecuting this war—wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the obsession with “homeland security,” the broad securitization of politics. In the face of these developments, some heartening and many disturbing, some liberalizing and some deeply anti-liberal, it is hard to dispute Michnik’s celebration of liberal banality as an achievement to be prized and an aspiration to be pursued. In the same way that twenty years ago, “we”—following Kant—celebrated the Revolutions of 1989,

“we” are powerfully disposed to celebrate the liberal course of these Revolutions, and to welcome their progeny into the embattled fold of liberal democracy. And rightly so.

At the same time, it would be ironic indeed if in the very name of liberal values we were to endorse a post-historical grand narrative that in effect relieved us of the burden of responsibility for our own future. And so, as I did in 1996, I suggest that we ought to resist such a narrative, quoting Albert Camus, who noted that “History, as an entirety, could exist only in the eyes of an observer outside it and outside the world. History only exists, in the final sense, for God.” I hope that I can simply presume that “we” liberals agree with Camus that humans are not God, that we are *a plurality of individuals* who are thoroughly immersed in a complex world not of our own choosing, who cannot know history “in the final sense,” and yet who are forced by circumstance to discern its meanings, act in accordance with our discernments, and judge those actions, in a never-ending process of *living* between past and future.¹¹ In this sense, the meaning of 1989 remains inherently plural, and contestable, and revisable in the light of experience, and even from the vantage point of a liberal democratic appreciation for the accomplishments of 1989, it is both possible and necessary to rethink this appreciation.

In my brief comments I want to encourage and to provoke such a *rethinking*. Such a stance is hardly radical. It is indeed a hallmark of modern democratic politics, founded on dramatic political ruptures—whether “revolutionary” or “*refolutionary*”—to continually rethink the “meaning” of the founding moment and to question the claims of the present to incarnate this moment. Such immanent criticism is an essential dimension of the rhetorical politics of modern democracy, as historians of the American and French Revolutions have made clear (indeed, the great and recently deceased Claude Lefort developed his important political theory of democratic openness on the basis of this insight). Speaking on the Fourth of July a decade before the U.S. civil war, ex-slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass powerfully called into question the meaning of a revolution (in 1776) that had become uncritically celebrated:

¹¹ See Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2000).

To say now that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy. Everybody can say it, the dastard, not less than the noble brave, can flippantly descant on the tyranny of England [...]. It is fashionable to do so; but there was a time when ... [it] tried men's souls. They who did so were accounted in their day plotters of mischief, agitators and rebels, dangerous men. To side with the right against the wrong, with the weak against the strong, and with the oppressed against the oppressor! Here lies the merit, and the one which, of all others, seems unfashionable in our day.¹²

I speak from a vantage point very different than that occupied by Douglass! And my point is not that there currently exists a cause as compelling to the cause of freedom as the abolition of slavery was in Douglass's day. But at the same time I surely think that if democracy "means" anything, it surely means attentiveness to the possibility that such compelling issues might exist or emerge, and there should exist a public sphere that is hospitable to such questions being posed. In this sense, democracy at its best is above all a system of collective political attentiveness to what C. Wright Mills once called "*the present as history and the future as responsibility*." With this important notion in mind, I would like briefly to delineate some ways in which the "we" who celebrate the "velvet revolutions" of 1989 ought to do so with circumspection and with a sense of self-limitation. I will conclude by briefly revisiting Michnik's metaphor, and suggesting that if liberal democracy is best seen as "gray," we ought to realize that there are indeed many shades of gray.

Who are the "We"? Who Celebrates 1989?

The famous Kant quote with which I began this essay is a paradigmatic "enlightenment" response to the age of democratic revolutions, celebrating a veritable "springtime of nations." And yet we know, just as Kant knew, that many spectators and even many participants did not

¹² Frederick Douglass, "Fourth of July Oration," in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 192.

welcome the French Revolution with enthusiasm and wishful, vicarious participation. For every Paine there was a Burke, for every Kant a de Maistre. The Revolution had its enemies. And even among its supporters and enthusiasts there was a range of opinions that, perhaps swept up together in common opposition to the Ancien Regime, soon found themselves in combat in the post-revolutionary moment. And, perhaps most importantly, most of Kant's contemporaries were enthusiasts of neither Enlightenment nor counter-Enlightenment. There are of course different ways of characterizing this broad "center" of modern politics. A "silent majority." A "mass." A "consumer society." A "civil association." The point is simply that it is not so easily characterized, except to say that it is rarely "enthusiastic" at all.

What was true then is true now. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a universal enthusiasm for "1989." "We" who currently commemorate the events so signified are a complex, diverse, and fractured "we," and indeed "we" include many colleagues who did not celebrate then or who celebrated then but not so much now, or who do not sincerely celebrate now or whose sincere celebration means some very different things. This may well be disillusioning to those drawn to a heroic and moralistic narrative of "civil society against the state" or "living in truth." And such a narrative has great appeal, perhaps even more to vicarious spectators such as myself than to actual participants. It is thrilling to imagine that one's political sensibilities merge into an encompassing movement of all right-thinking people, even if only for a moment.

At the same time, we ought to know better, especially "we liberals." For if contemporary political liberalism means anything, it means an awareness not simply that *that* God has failed, but that in a *political* sense God is *dead*, at least to us.¹³ Differences—of affiliations and of opinions—are an essential feature of the human condition. And human judgments—even the best of them—are fallible. And a politics that thinks otherwise is liable to arrogance at best or to the arrogation of power at worst. Joined together in opposition to communist authoritarianism in 1989 were a *range* of political groupings holding a range

¹³ See my discussion of the "God That Failed" theme in "The Road to Apostasy," *East European Politics and Societies* vol.16, no. 2 (2002): 564–71.

of opinions whose tensions and antagonisms hurried to the surface after The Fall, opinions about the efficiency and justice of markets; the proper structure of a representative democracy and in some cases even its desirability; the moral and political status of national and ethnic identities and the extent to which politics ought to serve such identities; the role of religion in politics; the rights of minorities; the freedom of the press; the importance of retributive justice; and the extent to which social justice reaches to questions of gender and sexuality. “We” here who participate together in this common commemoration no doubt disagree about some or all of these things. And beyond this academic conversation among intellectuals there is an even broader range of opinions on the answers to these questions. This is true among those who join in celebration of “1989”—who throughout Eastern Europe are often antagonistic contestants for political power even if through electoral means—but also those who never celebrated—unreconstructed communists, triumphalist nationalists—and those who once joined in activism and celebration, but who have in different ways changed their minds.

In some ways, my point here is obvious—a banal fact about the plurality of opinions in a democratic society no longer cowed into ideological submission. But my point is not simply “factual.” It is *normative* as well. For “1989” means different things to different individuals and constituencies, and is the source of ongoing and *legitimate* debate, as all debate must be legitimate in a liberal democracy. In the same way that there is a tendency during moments of revolutionary upheaval to be swept up by a sense of historical movement, and to obscure real differences in the name of an enthusiasm for liberation, there is a tendency during moments of commemoration of revolution for a similar forgetfulness to occur. That was Frederick Douglass’s point. It is a point of continuing relevance. Even for “us.” For even the best narratives can be somewhat forgetful of the complexity of the “we.”

As a case in point, I will cite a very recently published essay entitled “The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences,” written by my close friend and colleague, Vladimir Tismaneanu. I cite this piece because I am in fundamental agreement with virtually every one of its arguments regarding the complexity of the 1989 Revolutions and their legacies, and regarding the importance of defending liberal values in the face of their continued vulnerability. My point is that even

in this most careful of essays a certain rhetorical slippage occurs in the name of the “we” of 1989. Let me explain. Observing that liberal values are “under siege,” Tismaneanu writes that:

One reason for the rise of populist, politically fundamentalist movements is the presence of the paternalist temptation, the need for protection against the destabilizing effects of the transition to market and competition. [...] Political reform in all these post-communist societies has not gone far enough in creating the counter-majoritarian institutions (independent media, market economy, political parties) that would diminish the threat of new authoritarian experiments catering to the subliminal but powerful egalitarian-populist sentiments.¹⁴

This is an opinion, born of reflective experience and nourished by historical understanding, with which I largely agree. But it is an *opinion*, and it is possible to substantially disagree with this opinion without putting oneself beyond the pale of liberalism in all of its varieties. It may well be the case that the dismantling of communism required the introduction of relatively untrammelled markets, and indeed even “shock therapy” (it may also be that such “necessities” could have been managed in very different ways, to the extent that they were functional preconditions of dismantling communism). But Tismaneanu’s observation registers none of the *tragedy* of this. Indeed, “the need for protection against the destabilizing effects of the transition to market and competition,” described here as a “paternalist temptation” driven by a “subliminal” populism, could just as easily be described as a demand for *social justice* in response to the inherent insecurities of a capitalist market economy. Likewise, in considering the kinds of institution-building necessary amidst the new conditions, no mention is made of *social welfare* institutions. Now, again, there may well be good reasons for believing that the imperatives of transition or the EU or global financial institutions limit such institutions in the post-communist context. Or that given the rhetorical power of anti-liberalism,

¹⁴ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences,” *Contemporary European History* vol. 18, no. 3 (2009): 287.

it is civil liberties and an open public sphere, and not questions of distributive justice as effected through the welfare state and its regulated capitalism, that deserve pride of place, especially in post-Communist Eastern Europe. But this is an argument, in actual or potential competition with other arguments, about the balance between equality and efficiency, and the demands of distributive versus political justice in diverse post-communist settings. And while it is an argument that certainly contends with anti-liberal positions that pose real dangers in the East European context, it is also an argument that exists *within liberalism itself*, and certainly within a broader democratic discursive context of while liberalism is a part.

The recent positioning of Gáspár Miklós Tamás is an interesting case in point. A former Hungarian dissident and liberal activist in the wake of 1989, he has gained notoriety for his harsh critique of his former dissident colleagues, and for his avowal of revolutionary Marxism. In a June 2009 interview with the journal *International Socialism*, he declared: "By the time I came to break with the bourgeois mainstream there were no substitutes left, so I had to become a revolutionary Marxist. I did not see any other intelligent and credible solutions. You have to look the facts in the face. It is not a comfortable choice or a majority choice but that does not matter. I think that all the possibilities are exhausted."¹⁵ There are many compelling reasons to question the hyperbolic character of Tamás's critique of capitalism and social democracy ("post-fascism?")¹⁶; to be disturbed by the symbolism of his turn towards revolutionary Marxism in a post-Communist Eastern Europe still experiencing communist nostalgia and still grappling with the political remnants of the Communist *nomenklatura*. At the same time, twenty years ago many of the anti-communist dissidents were lionized *precisely* for their moral convictions and their refusal of expediency or consequentialist logic. More to the point, many of the particulars recounted by Tamás regarding the effects of the transition to capitalism in Eastern Europe are *true*. The neoliberal transition has

¹⁵ G. M. Tamás, "Interview: Hungary—Where We Went Wrong," *International Socialism* (24 June 2009, at <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=555>).

¹⁶ See his earlier provocative essay "On Post-Fascism: How Citizenship is Becoming an Exclusive Privilege," *Boston Review* (Summer 1999) <https://bostonreview.net/BR25.3/tamas.html> (accessed December 12, 2009).

caused enormous suffering for many social groups, and this has created a reservoir of support for the right. I quote Tamás at length about the consequences of the past decade of transition:

The very real rejoicing over pluralistic political competition and hugely increased freedom of expression was dampened by immiseration and lack of security, accompanied by the ever-increasing dominion of commercial popular culture, advertising, tabloids, and trash. What had been conceived of at first as colourful proved merely gaudy, and as it became more and more shop-soiled, its novel charm has waned.

All this was regarded by the unhappy eastern European populations as unmitigated and incomprehensible catastrophe. The political groups on the ground who possessed a little critical sense had been those which fought the former regime and continued to fight its ghost for a long time to come, and pushed the post-World War II liberal agenda—freedom of expression, constitutionalism, abortion rights, gay rights, anti-racism, anti-clericalism, anti-nationalism—certainly causes worth fighting for but bewildering to the popular classes, who were otherwise engaged—without any attention to the onset of widespread poverty, and social and cultural chaos. These groups combined the “human rights” discourse of the liberal left with the “free to choose” rhetoric of the neoconservative right (they still do, after 18 years) and thought of privatization as the break-up of the almighty state, which—armed with the weapon of redistribution—appeared to be the enemy to beat, saw the “dependency culture” as the ideological adversary, preventing the subjects of the *Sozialstaat* from becoming freedom-loving, upright, autonomous citizens. I remember—I was a member of the Hungarian parliament from 1990 to 1994—that we discussed the question of the republican coat of arms (with or without the Holy Crown; the party of “with” won) for five months, but there was no significant debate on unemployment while two million jobs went up into the air in a small country of ten million.

One does not have to be a “revolutionary Marxist” to note that there is truth in these observations, even if there is also much rhetorical sleight-

of-hand, whereby the author positions himself as a veritable tribune of a silent majority moved by a single judgment—"unmitigated catastrophe" (a hyperbolic judgment to be sure). Nor does one have to share Tamás's new-found radicalism to consider these developments significant. Indeed, political scientist David Ost, for example, in a more moderate and analytic vein, has repeatedly underscored the challenges to democracy in Eastern Europe caused by the weaknesses of working class interest representation. Of course, for Ost there is huge historical irony and injustice in this, since it was above all the Polish *Solidarność*—after all a *labor* movement—that led the anti-communist struggle.¹⁷ In a similar vein, a substantial body of feminist research in anthropology, sociology, and political science has underscored the ways in which the distributional consequences of the transition have caused a decline in the social and economic status of women, as labor market actors, home workers, and as the primary care-givers of children and the elderly.¹⁸ This is perhaps what Timothy Garton Ash meant to call attention to when he noted, as quoted in the *New York Times*, that many people in the East suffered from the transition to capitalism. "They feel the transition was very tough on them and feel cheated and even betrayed, and are open to conspiracy theories about shady deals done at the round tables," Mr. Garton Ash said. "It's not like the way in Britain we remember V-E Day," when Nazi Germany surrendered, he said. "It's really quite divided."¹⁹ Perhaps it is even what Agnes Heller meant when she observed, in a previously-published version of her contribution to this volume, that:

We have been unable to communicate our image and knowledge of the new world that we had entered. Maybe we have been so preoccupied with the political agenda of the day that we failed to consider the broader aspects and interconnections of our new

¹⁷ See David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Post-Communist Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ See, for example, Ann Snitow's fine essay "Women's Anniversaries: Snapshots of Polish Feminism Since 1989," *Dissent* vol. 56, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 61–67.

¹⁹ Timothy Garton Ash, quoted in Steven Erlanger, "The Legacy of 1989 is Still Up for Debate," *New York Times* (November 9, 2009), at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C02E3DC1F38F93AA35752C1A96F9C8B63&pagewanted=all>.

world. Do people really understand, if only a minority, the rules and opportunities of the world in which we now live? If we say capitalism, they understand: privatisation, loss of jobs, and foreign capital. What do people know about the market? Do they know, for instance, what is really meant by a self-regulating market, state regulation and state intervention? What do they know about democracy? In most cases it amounts to thinking there is an unnecessary parliament, bickering parties, corrupt politicians, lying, power-mad, extremely well-paid idlers, or worse. That is an unfair characterization even of the current Hungarian parties and politicians and their, sadly, all too weak performance. And when asked what can be done about the situation, the answer usually given is: nothing. Only bluster, whining and blaming others.²⁰

My point is not to condemn the course of the transition or to imply that there was any obvious alternative. It is only to insist that “we” who celebrate 1989 are an enormously complex “we,” and that our sense of commemoration ought to sustain the continued vitality of the “revolutions” as symbols of *ongoing political contestation* that includes many cogent criticisms. Questions regarding what these revolutions really meant or really mean, in whose name they were made and for whom they were beneficial, ought to be honored as questions, and social scientists and public intellectuals ought to address these questions in a spirit of vigorous analysis and debate. Just as importantly, we ought to keep alive an ethical appreciation of the fact that even the very best and most welcome developments have *costs*, that there is always a “remainder” in need of attention, redress, or sometimes simply regret.

What “We” Think—Does It Really Matter Anyway?

Of course, it only matters how “we” talk about who “we” are to the extent that what we intellectuals say matters to anyone other than ourselves. This too is a topic that warrants some further consideration.

²⁰ Agnes Heller, “Twenty Years On,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 193 (2009): 39–42 republished in English at *Eurozine* at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-04-07-heller-en.html>.

There lately has emerged a tendency to downplay the importance of public discourse in general, and public intellectuals in particular, in the revolutions of 1989 and in post-communist democratic upheavals more generally. Stephen Kotkin's *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of Communist Establishments* has recently received much attention for its critique of the purported role of dissenting intellectuals in the downfall of communism. According to Kotkin, it was the domestic and global crises of the communist regimes, precipitating fatal fractures within the *nomenklatura* elite, that most explains the downfall of these regimes. In this view, the role of "civil society" was more or less minimal, best understood as a "fiction" or "myth" than as an explanatory factor of any significance.²¹ In a similar vein, political scientist Lucan Way has recently argued in the *Journal of Democracy* (July 2008) that "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions" were structural, and that it was crises of state coercive capacity rather than the arguments of public intellectuals and the agency of democratic activists that most explains these popular upheavals.²² These arguments can be read as disenchanting correctives to perhaps simplistic or self-glorifying accounts of events by democratic intellectuals themselves. More importantly, I think they represent an understandable and welcome effort to "normalize" these democratic upsurges, to incorporate them within broader accounts of historical and political change, long-term crises of regimes or "waves" of democratization, and to give due attention to the constraints, limits and sometimes unintended and perverse consequences of these transitions. For these transitions may have been extraordinary processes, and some among us may even wax poetically about their "miraculous" character, but in fact they were secular historical events fully embedded in a set of social causalities and marked by limits as all political projects are so marked. There can be no denying that the bloom is off the rose of velvet or colored revolutions, and that simplistic narratives of civic virtue are of limited plausibility or usefulness. One of the advantages of some sense of historical distance is that it offers us the ability to develop more comparative and analytically refined understandings.

²¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of Communist Establishments* (New York: Modern Library, 2009).

²² Lucan Way, "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 19, no. 3 (July 2008): 55–69.

All the same, there is a sense in which such “normalized” understandings go too far in the opposite direction, substituting for a purported moralism a power-centered view of political events that accords no weight to the ideas that motivate and legitimate power and, even more importantly, that motivate and justify *challenges* to power that typically come at great personal cost and are ventured with no guarantee of success. As Timothy Garton Ash has sensibly insisted in a recent *New York Review of Books* essay, it makes as little sense to deny the agency of democratic activists as it does to imagine that they act as they please. For it is pretty obvious that activists act under constraints and in the face of severe obstacles; that nothing about their strategies, however ingenious, assures success; and that their hopes, dreams, and ideals are all tempered by pragmatics. At the same time, it is equally obvious that the delegitimation of a regime and the dedicated activism on behalf of its overthrow are both largely *normative* phenomena, in which ideas matter a great deal.²³

As many political scientists—most notably Mark Beissinger, Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wolchick—have argued, the post-1989 changes in Eastern Europe, and their continuation eastward in the former Soviet republics, were in large part a process of the *diffusion* of liberal democratic values, ideas, and strategies by transnational actors committed to freedom and inclined to share what they had learned through experience. In their recently published volume, Bunce and Wolchick trace a network of ideas, repertoires of non-violent resistant, and activists, from the revolutions of 1989 to the successful 1998 electoral campaign to defeat Meciar in Slovakia; to the similarly successful 2000 electoral defeat of Milošević in Serbia, in which Otpor and Center for Free Elections and Democracy played crucial roles; to the “Color Revolutions” in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004/5) and the aborted so-called “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan (2005). They conclude that:

All of the successful electoral breakthroughs were a product of complex transnational collaborations that brought together not just American democracy promoters and even in some cases U.S. ambassadors as well, but also two other key groups: regional

²³ Timothy Garton Ash, “1989!”: 4–8.

democracy promoters who had carried out their own electoral breakthroughs, and experienced, dedicated local activists willing to work hard, think in new ways and take personal risks.²⁴

These agents are clearly motivated by *ideas*. Such ideas, and the commitment to act on their behalf, in and of themselves explain very little about political outcomes. But it is equally impossible to explain the very *fact* of political revolt, much less the effort to enact a new form of political freedom and constitutional government—in many cases a successful effort—without taking seriously the beliefs that motivate such improbable action. To this extent ideas have always mattered and still matter. Of course, this does not mean that enlightenment impulses, or liberal democratic ideas, are sure to carry the day. To the contrary. Such impulses and ideals have always been and perhaps always will be relatively marginal, even in “consolidated” liberal democratic regimes whose constitutions incarnate these very ideas. Social scientists like Kotkin and Way are correct to insist that it is only in rare and precarious circumstances that liberal ideals can gain real traction among a population and can inspire or orient political change. But it is hard to think of any modern liberation that was not shaped by the ideas of liberation held and promoted by the liberators and their supporters. And however insufficient such ideas might be, it seems absurd to imagine them to be superfluous.

So “we” are a very complex assemblage of celebrants of “1989,” with different generational and regional and ideological histories, and different relationships to the events and their consequences, and most importantly, different opinions about these events and their consequences.

And what “we” think and do matters. It matters greatly to us as conscientious intellectuals who share an intellectual space in the global “republic of letters.” And it matters in a broader ethical and political sense, for our ideas emerge and draw energy and circulate in the world and have potential or actual effects in the world. What we think

²⁴ I would like to thank to Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik for offering me the possibility to use for this essay their unpublished manuscript. For a full account of the authors’ conclusion see Valerie Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in post-Communist Countries* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 327–353.

matters, and how we *rethink*, individually and together, and the intellectual practices by which we nurture and sustain such rethinking.

Shades of Gray

I would like to underscore the plurality of these practices, and in so doing I would like to return, briefly, to Michnik's metaphor of "gray," and to expand on the metaphor proposing, in a way I think Michnik would agree, that the "beautiful gray" of democracy comes in many shades.

Tony Judt, in his short book *The Burden of Responsibility*, explains how Albert Camus, Raymond Aron, and Leon Blum each incarnated an exemplary kind of political responsibility, of the moralist, social scientist, and politician respectively. What I like about this book is Judt's insight that responsibility can take different forms in different spheres or domains. Obviously the boundaries distinguishing such domains overlap, and are porous, and differences of perspective regarding their meanings contribute to the fractiousness of a liberal democratic culture and society. This volume is a testament to the richness and diversity of current reflection on "the meanings of 1989." Indeed, it is a testament to the ongoing character of such reflection, which in fact has been an *ever-present* feature of the post-1989 cultural landscape certainly in Eastern Europe, but I think more broadly as well. Numerous commentators, including some contributors to this volume, have noted the extraordinary role of intellectuals in the revolutions of 1989, and have remarked, with some regret, that in the post-revolutionary period it has been increasingly difficult for intellectuals in general—including some of the most prominent "heroes" of 1989—to play a constructive role in a public discourse increasingly crowded out by partisan rancor and commercialism. At the same time, it is possible to identify a number of different and yet complimentary strategies whereby intellectuals and scholars have sought to keep alive the complex legacies of 1989. For the sake of brevity I will merely list these; their general importance is fairly straightforward, at the same time that each could easily be the subject of an essay of its own:

- The development of academic disciplines, interdisciplinary centers, and university institutions oriented toward the nurturing of

critical and publicly relevant scholarly inquiry. This comes in many forms, from the legal and constitutional inquiry promoted at Central European University in Budapest by János Kis and András Bozóki, to the empirically-oriented social science of public policy developed by my close friend and colleague Mihaela Miriou and her colleagues at the National School for Political Science and Public Administration in Bucharest, to the cultural work of institutions such as the Romanian Cultural Institute which, under the leadership of Horia Potapevici, has sought to promote a publicly relevant form of humanistic inquiry rooted in European high culture.

– The synergistic development of professional forms of historical scholarship and a public historical consciousness oriented towards keeping alive the historical memory of Communism and Fascism in Eastern Europe, and nurturing critical public discourse about the legacies of totalitarianism; here I would note the exemplary work of István Rév as Director of the Open Society Archives in Budapest, and also the contributions of our colleague Vladimir Tismaneanu, in academic works such as *Fantasies of Salvation*, and in his capacity as head of the Romanian Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship.

– Journalistic work, as writers and public intellectuals and as editors of and regular contributors to magazines, journals, and newspapers dedicated to elevating democratic discourse and promoting a discourse ethic of mutual respect in post-authoritarian settings. Here the example of Adam Michnik looms especially large, due to his role both as a writer and as Editor-in-Chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*; but the literary public sphere of post-Communist societies continues to be prolific and robust, even if it lacks the political traction that it had during the years of dissenting from Communism.

– Work monitoring and advocating on behalf of freedom of expression, academic freedom, and a free press, of the kind for example vigorously pursued by Miklós Haraszti in his tenure as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (which ended in 2010).

And there is, of course the essentially non-literary or public-intellectual work of social entrepreneurship, NGO leadership, social movement organizing, and the more directly political work of party building, electoral campaigning and office-seeking, and public service more generally. Judt's typology of political, moral, and academic responsibility is

a useful way to think about the broad range of ways that celebrants of the revolutions of 1989 and especially these revolutions' intellectuals have to keep alive the legacies of democratic transformation.

Indeed, in calling attention to the plurality of ways in which these legacies can be interpreted, remembered, and enacted in deed, I mean simply to underscore how important it is to resist any simple narratives of oppression or liberation, and at the same time how important it is to be open to vigorous debate about what being "true" to the liberations of 1989 currently entails.

I will conclude *not* by repudiating Michnik's encomiums to "gray," but by suggesting that if liberal democracy is best seen as "gray," we ought to realize that there are many shades of gray, and indeed that while the broad zone of "gray" that comprises normal democratic politics may efface the bold reds, blacks, and browns of the last century, it also blends a complex palette of more welcome colors—from the "pink" of sexual and gender freedom to the "green" of contemporary environmentalism, to the orange, rose, violet and green colors of the relatively recent "color revolutions" in Europe and beyond. Understood as such a complex blend, liberal democracy is neither dull nor banal; it is *an extraordinary form of ordinary politics*, capable of incorporating both the rule of law and a perpetual openness to the claims of justice, in a combination that is uneasy, chronically unstable, and enormously compelling. The task of commemorating its achievements is thus inextricably linked a responsibility for hurting and extending them.

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"The present volume is an attempt to provide a fresh interpretation of the contexts, meanings, and consequences of the revolutions of 1989. It does not aim to search for 'new truths' or novel explanations for the fall of Communism and for the mostly peaceful and sudden upheavals that took place in 1989. It does, however, emphatically argue for re-thinking, re-visiting, and re-assessing the filters and means that scholars use to interpret this watershed moment in our recent history..... The upheaval in Eastern Europe represented a series of political revolutions that led to the decisive and irreversible transformation of the existing order. Instead of autocratic, one-party systems, the revolutions created emerging pluralist polities. While it is true that we still do not know whether all these societies have become well-functioning liberal democracies, it is nevertheless important to emphasize that in all of them the Leninist systems based on ideological uniformity, political coercion, dictatorship over human needs and suppression of civic rights have been dismantled."

Excerpts from Introduction by Vladimir Tismaneanu, University of Maryland

"The contributions to this volume add original perspectives not only to the ongoing discussions about the roots and consequences of the collapse of East European Communism but also engage in a stimulating fashion with the broader academic and intellectual debates about the battle of ideologies in the twentieth century and the likely implications of the demise of Marxist-Leninist regimes in the former Soviet space for the evolution of Western liberalism and its potential ideological challengers."

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